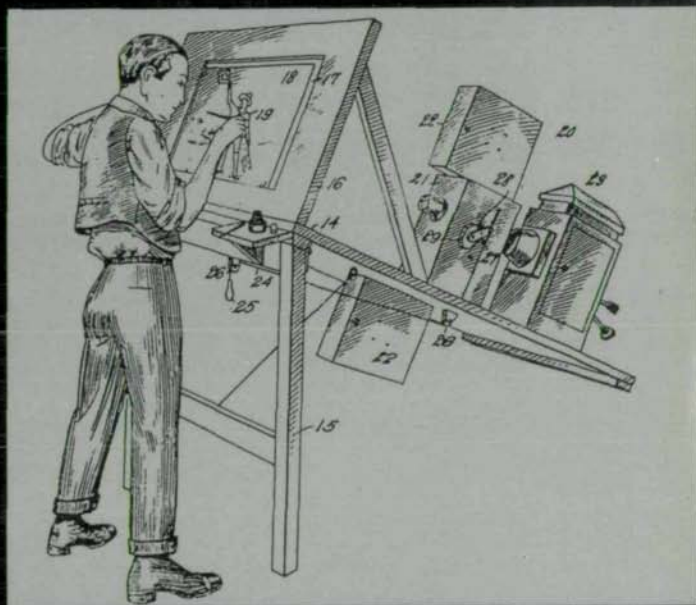


Screen



Animation

The fifties: Italy and Hollywood

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The Rotoscope, US patent, 9 October 1917

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The Disney-Fleischer dilemma: product differentiation and technological innovation

MARK LANGER

An examination of competing three-dimensional animation technologies at the Disney and Fleischer studios during the 1930s reveals problems in previous historical accounts of their genesis and use. The first of these technologies was the Stereoptical Process, invented by Max Fleischer and John Burks of the Fleischer Studios, Inc. in 1933. The Stereoptical Process was a three-dimensional setback system arranged horizontally, with the camera in front of the cels and background. Cels containing the animated characters were photographed in front of a three-dimensional set mounted on a turntable. The turntable could be rotated in order to get the effect of a pan or tracking shot. The background set was constructed with a vanishing point at the centre of the turntable so that the further an object was from the lens, the more slowly it appeared to move. When photographed, it appeared as if the two-dimensional cartoon characters were moving within a three-dimensional environment.¹

The Multiplane camera, developed by a Walt Disney Productions team headed by William Garity, was a vertical arrangement with the camera above the elements to be photographed. Unlike the earlier Stereoptical Process, the Multiplane camera used two-dimensional elements for each plane within the background. Artwork of different planes was held in individual light boxes, separated from other artwork by some distance. This made the various foreground and background planes spatially distinct. A greater illusion of depth was

¹ Max Fleischer, US Patent 2,054,414, 15 September 1936; Seymour Kneitel and Izzy Sparber, *Standard Production Reference* (Miami: Fleischer Studios, Inc., 1940), p. 29.

- 2 C W Batchelder, *Multiplane Manual* (Burbank: Walt Disney Studio, c1939), pp. 1-6.
- 3 'Invents movie 3rd dimension', *NY Morning Telegraph*, 11 March 1934, n.p.; William Stull, 'Three hundred men and Walt Disney: That's the analysis of one reporter', *American Cinematographer*, vol. 19, no. 2 (1938), pp. 50, 58; C W Batchelder, 'Multiplane camera lecture for ass't directors', *Walt Disney Archive, Standard Production Reference*, 13 January 1939, pp. 29-31.
- 4 This study will not attempt to separate the individual contributions of Max Fleischer or John Burks to the development of the Stereoptical Process, nor that of Walt Disney, Ub Iwerks or William Gantzy to the Multiplane camera. A mention of a single name may depict an exclusive individual, or an entity representing the technological work of several people. Joe Adamson, 'A talk with Dick Huemer', in Danny Peary and Gerald Peary (eds), *The American Animated Cartoon* (New York: E P Dutton, 1980), p. 33; Lotte Reiniger, 'The adventures of Prince Achmed or what may happen to someone trying to make a full length cartoon in 1926', *The Silent Picture*, no. 6 (1970), pp. 2-4; Peter Adamakos, 'Ub Iwerks', *Mindrot*, no. 7 (1977), p. 24; William Moritz, 'Resistance and subversion in animated films of the Nazi era: the case of Hans Fischerkoesen', *Animation Journal*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1992), pp. 5-33.

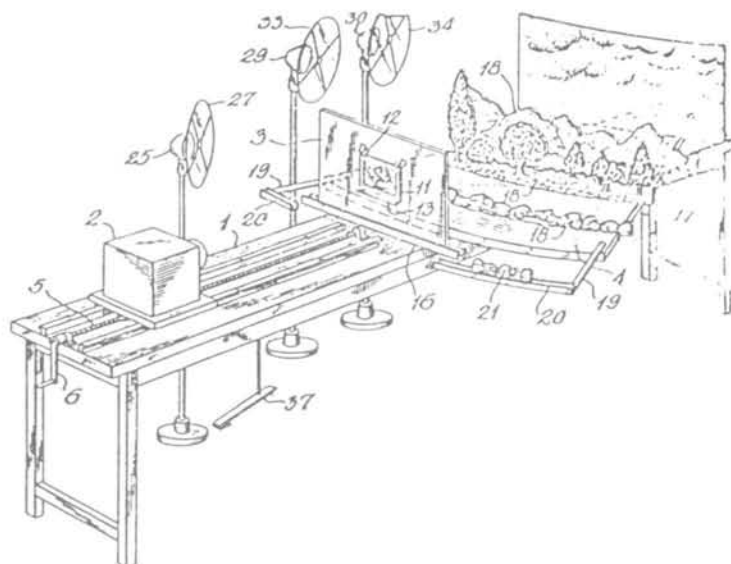
**The Stereoptical Process,
US patent,
15 September 1936**

achieved by moving the camera down toward the background elements.²

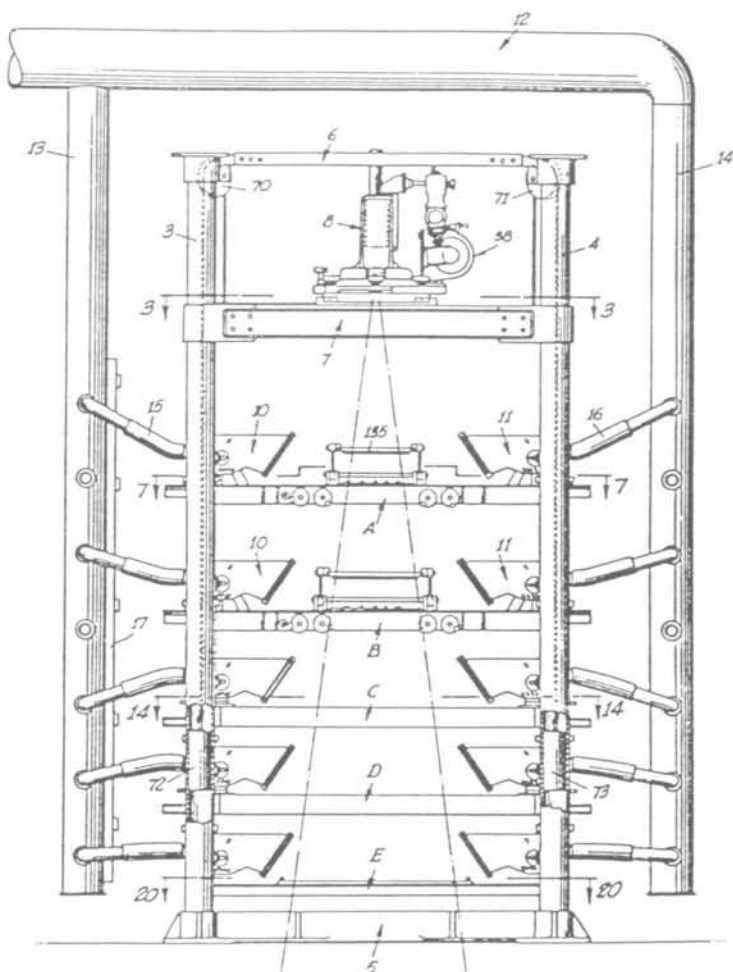
Neither technology was particularly efficient. Both were extremely expensive in their use of labour and materials. Light reflections from the surfaces of cels were a major problem with both processes, and the Multiplane camera had particular trouble with dust accumulation on the image surface. The employment of the Stereoptical Process was very time-consuming due to the remarkably long camera exposures required.³ Why then were these technologies developed and used? Recounting a progression of three-dimensional animation processes from Carl Lederer's apparatus used in the 1910s, Lotte Reiniger and Carl Koch's device employed in the 1920s, through Ub Iwerks's development of a horizontal Multiplane camera before 1934, and Hans Fischerkoesen's appropriation of the Multiplane and Stereoptical technology in the 1940s is a task for other historians.⁴ This study concentrates on the methodological problems posed by past considerations of the Disney and Fleischer processes.

Historical representations of the development of the Stereoptical Process and of the Multiplane camera explain the genesis of these new technologies in two major ways. Either the technologies were introduced through the imagination of an inventive genius, or they were developed as a movement towards greater realism in animation. In other words, accounts of the development of the Stereoptical Process and Multiplane camera involve either a belief in the 'great man' theory of history, or a belief that animation history followed an evolutionary or teleological progression towards mimesis.

Historians representing these two groups overlap to a certain



**The Multiplane camera,
US patent,
23 April 1940**



extent. Among the 'great man' proponents are such people as Leonard Maltin, Richard Schickel, Ralph Stephenson, Frank Thomas, Ollie Johnston, G. Michael Dobbs, and Leslie Carbaga.⁵ Thomas and Johnston state

Bill Garity, an expert on camera lenses, was nominal head of the department, but Walt worked with each man on an individual basis. . . . They were called into sweatboxes and story meetings and often just sat around listening, getting the feel of what Walt was after. . . . Once they were asked to build an arrangement that could hold separate layers of artwork at varying distances from a still camera . . . it worked and Walt liked the result and suddenly was talking about building another one, larger and more complicated, that might be used for shooting animation. . . . And so the first multiplane camera was born.⁶

⁵ Leslie Carbaga, *The Fleischer Story* (New York: Nostalgia Press, 1976), p. 71, G. Michael Dobbs, 'Koko Komments', *Animato*, no. 18 (1989), p. 35, Leonard Maltin, *Of Mice and Magic* (New York: Plume, 1980), pp. 109–10, Richard Schickel, *The Disney Version* (New York: Avon, 1968), pp. 164–5, Ralph Stephenson, *The Animated Film* (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1973), p. 37.

⁶ Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston, *Disney Animation: The Illusion of Life* (New York: Abbeville, 1981), pp. 262–4.

7 Carbaga, *The Fleischer Story*, p. 71; Dobbs, 'Koko Komments', p. 35.

8 Leonard Maltin, *The Disney Films* (New York: Crown, 1973), pp. 12–13; David R. Smith, 'Beginnings of the Disney Multiplane camera', in Charles Solomon (ed.), *The Art of the Animated Image: An Anthology* (Los Angeles: The American Film Institute, 1987), p. 41; Richard Holliss and Brian Sibley, *The Disney Studio Story* (New York: Crown, 198), p. 30.

9 Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (New York: Schocken, 1975), p. 13.

Similar thinking informs Leslie Carbaga's *The Fleischer Story*, in which the author dubs the Stereoptical device 'The most wondrous of Max's highly acclaimed innovations'. G. Michael Dobbs sees the Stereoptical Process as a physical simulacrum of Max Fleischer's thought: 'Max Fleischer . . .', avers Dobbs, ' . . . was very literal-minded, and his method of adding three dimensions to cartoons reflects this belief. You want three dimensions, you use a three-dimensional model as your background!' Historians who promote evolutionary or teleological arguments include Leonard Maltin (again), David R. Smith and Richard Hollis and Brian Sibley. Hollis and Sibley maintain

. . . there was the perennial difficulty of conveying 'depth', something that hadn't mattered in the early comic cartoons but that was of vital importance in creating the realistic mood Walt wanted for *Snow White*. An illusion of depth was eventually achieved by . . . the huge but extremely versatile 'multiplane camera'⁸

In such considerations, the 'great man' theory and teleology coalesce. Great inventors provide the technology to aid in the inevitable march of progress. While one should not wish completely to deny concepts of individual endeavour or progress as historical factors, one must question the assumptions that underlie these concepts. The 'great man' theory views individual creativity as the motor of history. Is innovation an individual act, or does it have an institutional dynamic? Do personal or institutional interests best provide a motive for the creation of these new, expensive and unwieldy technologies?

Secondly, teleological or evolutionary approaches join with the 'great man' theory in projecting history as a line of continuous development in one direction. These approaches reflect a belief in technological innovation as part of an ideology of progress. Something is invented by someone and technological, industrial or social change follows. Raymond Williams has criticized this type of technological determinism for assuming that

new technologies are discovered by an essentially internal process of research and development, which then sets the conditions for social change and progress. The effects of the technologies, whether direct or indirect, foreseen or unforeseen, are, as it were, the rest of history.⁹

Absent from such considerations is the possibility that research and development is a symptom, rather than an agent, of social change and progress. While Williams discusses the external dynamic of a system that incorporates technological innovation, this article examines the particular cultural subsets of the American animation industry, with focus on the actions of Walt Disney Productions and

the Fleischer Studios, Inc. Broader parallels between this internal dynamic and the film industry at large or the social/economic system as it existed in the 1920 to 1942 period may be implied. However, the external dynamic will not be examined specifically in this study.

In historical representations of the Multiplane camera and Stereoptical Process, the consequence of invention is portrayed as primarily aesthetic rather than social or economic. Oddly enough (in light of the fact that animation does not use a three-dimensional, live performance as its starting point), this aesthetic/historical system is strikingly comparable to that voiced by André Bazin, who stated that 'Cinema attains its fullness in the art of the real'. To Bazin, the basic need completely to represent reality was the driving force behind technological advancement. Thus, technological innovations such as sound, colour and wide screen created a closer relationship between cinema and its surrounding world.¹⁰ Similarly, animation historians view the development of style and technology within American studio animation to 1942 as an unbroken march towards mimesis. Richard Schickel, for example, sees the Multiplane camera as a logical aesthetic extension of Disney's adoption of sound and colour: 'The multiplane camera thus becomes a symbolic act of completion for Disney. With it, he broke the last major barrier between his art and realism of the photographic kind'.¹¹

It is the end point of this march that poses a challenge to the assumptions behind these historical methodologies. Both the Stereoptical and Multiplane technologies led to dead ends. Use of the Stereoptical Process was discontinued by 1941, and the Multiplane camera was employed with decreasing frequency through the 1940s. No significant amount of further technical refinement or development was made of either apparatus. Historical methodologies previously applied to three-dimensional animation technology all assume that history unfolds in a rational, continuous manner. The 'great man' theory accounts for the invention of these technologies as a logical extension of a visionary personality. The evolutionary or teleological approaches presume some sort of continuity, whether through the permanent institutionalization of these technologies, or through their organic relationship to some further development. The aesthetic assumptions see these technologies as a logical development towards mimesis. Mimesis was later abandoned in favour of increasingly 'flat' and stylized graphics used from 1942 throughout the US animation industry. As will later be demonstrated, this stylistic change, which is usually credited to such studios as Warner Bros or UPA, can be observed within the films of those very studios that were allegedly heading toward mimesis. These films include *Bone Trouble* (1940), *Fantasia* (1940), *The Reluctant Dragon* (1941) or *Dumbo* (1941) at Disney; and *Goonland* (1938) and *Mr Bug Goes To Town* (1941) at Fleischer.

Through an examination of both the institutional history and the

¹⁰ André Bazin, *What Is Cinema?* Vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p. 15; Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice* (New York: Knopf, 1985), pp. 70–1.

¹¹ Schickel, *The Disney Version*, p. 169. A categorical but ahistorical description of the Multiplane camera and Stereoptical Process can be found in Russell George, 'Some spatial characteristics of the Hollywood cartoon', *Screen*, vol. 31, no. 3 (1990), pp. 296–321.

12 Janet Staiger, 'The Hollywood mode of production: conditions of existence', in David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 88.

13 Staiger, 'Standardization and differentiation', *ibid.* p. 97. Staiger's earlier thinking appears to be influenced by Paul A. Baran and Paul M. Sweezy's *Monopoly Capital: An Essay on the American Economic and Social Order* (New York: Modern Reader Paperbacks, 1968). Later, Staiger has called for a less deterministic view of product differentiation through advertising. She has argued that while film advertising differentiates its product, the industry differs from general practices in individuating each item it makes, and observes that the public often resists these individual campaigns. Janet Staiger, 'Announcing wares, winning patrons, voicing ideals: thinking about the history and theory of film advertising', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 29, no. 3 (1990), pp. 6, 21–3. While individuation may be true of advertising directed to theatre patrons, it is not wholly the case regarding advertisements in trade journals, which were directed to theatre managers. In this latter case, brand name product differentiation played an active part.

14 Lester Telser, 'Advertising and competition', *Journal of Political Economy*, no. 70 (1964), pp. 537–62; Norman Schneider, 'Product differentiation, oligopoly and the stability of market shares', *Western Economic Journal*, no. 5 (1966), pp. 58–63. An historical overview of the debates surrounding product differentiation can be found in William Breit and Kenneth G. Elzinga, 'Product differentiation and institutionalism: new shadows on an old terrain', *Journal of Economics Issues*, vol. 8, no. 4 (1974), pp. 813–26.

style of films produced by the Disney and Fleischer studios during the 1930s and early 1940s, I wish to propose the need for alternative historical models of innovation and competition to those used by previous animation historians: models not so dependent on the presumption of a rational order governing the behaviour of individuals, institutions, technologies or aesthetic movements. Such models take into account not only the strategies of institutional interaction between Fleischer Studios, Inc. and Walt Disney Productions, but also the coexistence of different styles within the discourse of each studio.

Janet Staiger, in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, notes that many of Hollywood's production practices resulted from a tension in its economic practices. Staiger defines this tension as a movement towards standardizing the product for efficient, economical mass production, and a simultaneous movement towards differentiating the product as the firms bid competitively for a consumer's disposable income.¹² Staiger points out that innovation was an economic necessity, even though it often involved higher production costs. Competition between different film companies led them to differentiate their products. Through product differentiation, one firm could emphasize how its goods differed in kind, and presumably in quality, from those of other companies. Elsewhere Staiger has explored this topic more thoroughly in relation to film advertising.¹³ In the present study, product differentiation will be explored from the point of view of technological innovation and industrial competition. According to Staiger's model, innovation and product differentiation in the animation industry resulting from the development of the Stereoptical Process and the Multiplane camera would have enhanced long-term stability at the Disney and Fleischer organizations.

Staiger's view of institutional behaviour suggests a paradox. Although innovation and differentiation are meant to improve a company's long-term profits, their coincident costs do not appear upon reflection to be in the interests of an institution's financial health. Each innovation is presumably met by a response from the institution's competitor, resulting in a never-ending cycle of expensive product differentiation and a consequent erosion of profit. While Staiger earlier viewed product differentiation as an essentially rational decision that aids economic stability, empirical studies have shown that product differentiation is often associated with industrial instability in commercial sectors.¹⁴ Indeed, within a few years of the development of the Stereoptical Process and the Multiplane camera, Fleischer Studios, Inc. was out of business and Walt Disney Productions was in severe financial trouble. Other determinants, such as labour strife and changes in the marketplace, were contributing factors to these troubles. However, competition and

technological development were among the difficulties encountered by both organizations.

Central to Staiger's model is the concept of a conflict mechanism within the film industry. If one accepts this model of industrial organization as the impetus behind innovation and product differentiation, then one accepts a model suitable for analysis through game theory. Although it began as a form of strategic studies, game theory in the past few decades has been applied to the study of business, economics, social behaviour and biology. Game theory has been defined by Martin Shubik as a method of studying decision-making in conflict situations.¹⁵ In general, game theory concerns the actions of competing individuals or groups who are conscious that their efforts affect each other. Eric Rasmusen states: 'Game theory is not useful when decisions are made that ignore the reactions of others or treat them as impersonal market forces'.¹⁶

Evidence suggests that the Disney and Fleischer studios were keenly aware of each others' actions. While by the early 1930s Walt Disney Productions was considered to be the leader in terms of artistic innovation, Fleischer Studios, Inc., through cost control and the popularity of their 'Popeye' character, created animated films that were far more profitable to the Fleischers and their distributor Paramount than were Disney's when distributed by United Artists or RKO. Fleischer Studios, Inc. was the leading animation studio on the east coast of the United States, dominating in prestige and profitability its local competitors Van Beuren and Terry. Max Fleischer resented Disney's having lured away many of his top employees with high salaries, and was conscious of Disney having utilized many Fleischer-developed processes, such as the Rotoscope. Walt Disney Productions took little notice of such west coast competitors as Celebrity Productions, Harman & Ising, or Leon Schlesinger. For example, while requesting screenings for the training of studio staff in 1935, Disney stated: 'I think it is all right to show Fleischer's stuff, but I would keep away from the local product'.¹⁷ While many early animation companies were preoccupied with the development of new technology, by 1934 Walt Disney Productions and Fleischer Studios, Inc. were the only animation studios conducting research and development on a sustained basis. Both companies were highly competitive and noncooperative.¹⁸

Game theory provides a means of accounting for the behaviour of competing institutions such as Walt Disney Productions and Fleischer Studios, Inc. Games are distinguished by their goals as either zero-sum games or non-zero-sum games. Poker and elections are examples of zero-sum games in that the winner takes all and the loser gets nothing. Any advantage that accrues to one player in a zero-sum game results in a corresponding loss by the other player. Non-zero-sum games correspond more to the conditions of mature oligopoly that existed in the film industry in the 1930s. They are not

15 Martin Shubik, 'Game theory and the study of social behaviour: an introductory exposition', in Martin Shubik (ed.), *Game Theory and Related Approaches to Social Behaviour* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1964), pp. 4-5.

16 Eric Rasmusen, *Games and Information: An Introduction to Game Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p. 21.

17 Walt Disney, Memo, 18 September 1935, Walt Disney Archives.

18 While Ub Iwerks did some development of a horizontal three-dimensional process at Celebrity Productions, this effort did not proceed independently of the one at Walt Disney Productions beyond 1934. Max Fleischer, US Patent no. 1,242,674, 9 October 1917; 'Mickey Mouse as actor a dud at making money', *N.Y. Herald-Tribune*, 12 March 1934; 'Disney's "Pigs" eat up profits', *New York Telegraph*, 18 November 1933; A. M. Botsford to Russell Holman, Memo, 1 March 1938, *Gulliver's Travels* Production File (private collection); Austin Keough, Max Fleischer and Dave Fleischer, *Agreement*, 24 May 1941, pp. 11, 12; Richard Fleischer, interviews with the author, 8 November 1990 and 18 May 1991; Grim Natwick, interview with the author, 28 January 1990.

based on the premiss that what one player wins, the other must lose. Non-zero-sum games leave open the possibilities that both players might gain advantage, that one might benefit while the other loses, or that both might lose. As a result, non-zero-sum games leave the possibility for both conflict and cooperation.

Non-zero-sum games divide into two categories – cooperative and noncooperative games. A cooperative game is one in which the players make binding commitments with each other. In a noncooperative game, they do not. As Eric Rasmusen has observed: 'Noncooperative game theory is economic in flavour, with solution concepts based on players maximizing their own utility functions subject to stated constraints'.¹⁹ In terms of game theory, the competition between the Fleischer Studios, Inc. and Walt Disney Productions may be categorized as a non-zero-sum noncooperative game, wherein each player sought to maximize his own position.

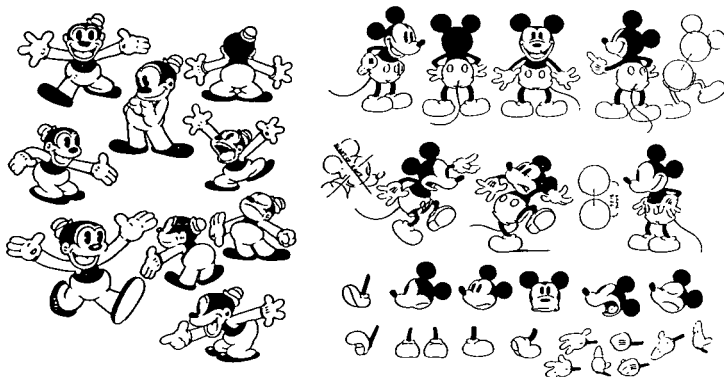
Much scholarship, such as Donald Crafton's and Kristin Thompson's work on the adoption of the cel method, Harvey Deneroff's writings on labour organization, or my own work on studio hierarchies, has emphasized the movement towards commercial standardization in the American animation industry.²⁰ The need to provide a standard product resulted in other forms of regulation. Most animated films were one reel in length. Standardization encouraged the production of animation series constructed around a central 'star' character, such as Felix the Cat, Ko-Ko the Clown or Mickey Mouse. Even as the dictates of commerce standardized animation production, commerce also motivated a countervailing tendency towards product differentiation. For example, the Warner Bros Negro boy character Bosko has been seen as imitative of Disney's Mickey Mouse in terms of his physical proportions, simple black on white 'inkblot' design, squeaky voice and musical routines.²¹ But Bosko was also clearly differentiated from Mickey Mouse by the use of long trousers and the lack of tail and mouse ears. Imitation of the successful product of one company was counterbalanced by the need to distinguish the product of one

¹⁹ Rasmusen, *Games and Information*, p. 29.

²⁰ Donald Crafton, 'The Henry Ford of animation: John Randolph Bray', and 'The animation "shops"', in *Before Mickey: The Animated Film 1898-1928* (London: MIT Press, 1982), pp. 137-216; Kristin Thompson, 'Implications of the cel animation technique', in Teresa De Lauretis and Stephen Heath (eds), *The Cinematic Apparatus* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1980), pp. 106-20; Harvey Raphael Deneroff, 'Popeye the union man: a historical study of the Fleischer strike', unpublished dissertation, University of Southern California, 1985; Mark Langer, 'Institutional power and the Fleischer Studios: the Standard Production Reference', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 30, no. 2 (1991), pp. 3-21.

²¹ Greg Ford, 'Warner Brothers [sic]', *Film Comment*, vol. 11, no. 1 (1975), p. 16.

Mickey Mouse and Bosko
(courtesy of the
Walt Disney Corporation
and Warner Bros)



²² Live-action counterparts to this kind of combined imitation/distinction include the Billy West and Harold Lloyd 'Lonesome Luke' spinoffs of the Chaplin tramp. Legal considerations played a part in product differentiation, as evinced by the lawsuit brought against Van Beuren by Walt Disney for copying the Mickey Mouse character. 'Van Beuren [sic] scoffs at Disney suit', *Motion Picture Daily*, 15 April 1931.

²³ Rasmusen, *Games and Information*, p. 29.

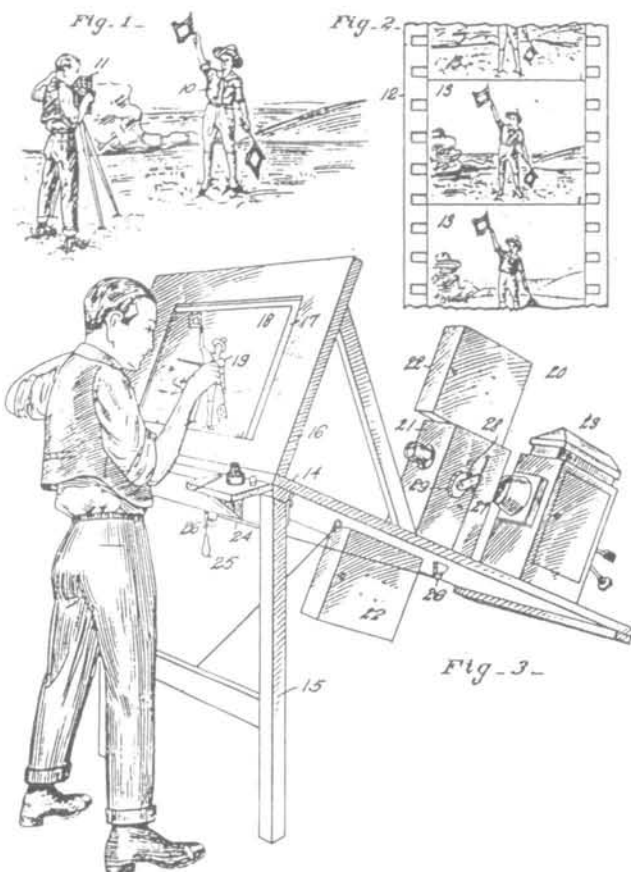
²⁴ Malcolm W. Browne, 'Biologists tally generosity's rewards', *The New York Times*, 14 April 1992, pp. C1, C8; James E. Dougherty and Robert L. Pfaltzgraff Jr, *Contending Theories of International Relations* (New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1971), pp. 353-7; Alvin Scodel, J. Sayer Minas and Milton Lipetz, 'Some descriptive aspects of two person non-zero-sum games', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 3 (June 1959), p. 115, cited in *ibid*.

company from that of another firm.²² Product differentiation was common in the American animation industry during the 1920s and 1930s, but was accomplished primarily through graphic style or character design. Product differentiation by means of technology was far more expensive. During the period, innovation of animation technology was motivated chiefly by competition between the two major animation companies – Fleischer Studios, Inc. and Walt Disney Productions.

The Disney-Fleischer competition suggests the non-zero-sum, noncooperative model called the Prisoner's Dilemma. The Prisoner's Dilemma is found in many different situations, such as oligopoly pricing, auction bidding, salesman effort, political bargaining, arms races or other forms of conflict in which all participants are adversely affected.²³ The Prisoner's Dilemma model supposes that the two players are criminals who have been apprehended and jailed after the commission of a crime. Each of the prisoners is informed by the police that if he denounces the other one, he will go free, while the other prisoner will go to jail for three years. If both prisoners remain silent, each will receive a one-year sentence. If both prisoners denounce each other, each will get two years in prison.

The best collective strategy would be for both prisoners to remain silent. This way, each prisoner would serve only one year in prison. However, since the two prisoners cannot communicate, neither can trust the other. In the absence of trust, if the game is played *only once*, the best policy is to betray one's partner. This will result in an equal chance of either a two-year sentence or escaping punishment altogether, depending on whether the other prisoner is silent or also opts for betrayal. If the same players play a *series* of rounds, the best strategy changes. Since each player can assess the results of the strategy, each prisoner can infer what the other prisoner did by evaluating the outcome of each round. This allows tacit cooperation to take place. If each prisoner continues always to betray the other, their combined sentences will be longer than that with any other strategy. The best way to maximize gains would be for the two prisoners to cooperate tacitly, and remain silent. Empirical studies of the Prisoner's Dilemma have shown that players rarely act in their own long-term interests. Instead, they irrationally attempt to best their competitor in each round.²⁴

Competition between two noncooperative companies can be likened to the Prisoner's Dilemma. Each of the companies strives to find some advantage over its competitor, even though rational long-term economic interests argue against this approach. One potential advantage arises through the product differentiation that results from technological development. As earlier observed, differentiation of product began in the earliest years of animation, but



The Rotoscope.
US patent,
9 October 1917

technological differentiation became a central feature of the competition between Fleischer Studios, Inc. and Walt Disney Productions. Max and Dave Fleischer's first animated cartoon was manufactured in 1915. Although their films used the then common convention of depicting both the artist and the animated character in the same world, they were differentiated from contemporary animated films through the use of the Rotoscope. The Rotoscope allowed an animator to copy live-action movement by means of the rear projection of live-action film frame by frame onto a piece of translucent glass set into a drawing board. The improved smoothness of movement obtained by this process was a central part of the marketing publicity surrounding the Fleischer brothers' 'Out of the Inkwell' cartoons. As *The New York Times* noted in 1920, the Fleischer protagonist, Ko-Ko the Clown, had

a number of distinguishing characteristics. His motions, for one thing, are smooth and graceful. . . . He does not jerk himself from one position to another, nor does he move an arm or leg while

the remainder of his body remains as unnaturally still as if it were fixed in ink lines on paper.

In 1925, Max Fleischer invented the Rotograph as a further advance in technological product differentiation. The Rotograph was a rear-projection system which allowed superior image quality and ease of construction of scenes combining live action and animated characters.²⁵

Disney's entry into national distribution of product also depended on product differentiation. Disney's first series protagonist in the 'Alice Comedies' was a live-action girl played by Margaret Davis. In the 'Alice Comedies' this character was matted into a cartoon world. Such practice differed from that of competing animation series which featured animated protagonists. Although the Fleischer 'Out of the Inkwell' cartoons mixed live action and animation, their protagonists were drawn figures (albeit rotoscoped in the case of Ko-Ko the Clown) in a live-action world. Disney's distributor, Margaret J. Winkler, had been Max Fleischer's distributor. When Fleischer and Winkler parted company upon Max Fleischer's venture into distributing his own product, Winkler arranged to distribute the Disney product. She announced the 'Alice Comedies' in trade papers as 'Kid comedies with cartoons coordinated into the action. A distinct novelty'. Contemporary trade reviews made much of the distinctiveness and novelty of a live-action girl in a cartoon world. By emphasizing his live character Alice, rather than an animated rotoscoped character like Ko-Ko, Disney consciously used some conventions of classical Hollywood cinema as a means to differentiate his product from the products of others.²⁶

A chronology of technological innovations at the Disney and Fleischer studios demonstrates a competitive pattern of innovation and product differentiation. From 1924 to 1926, Max and Dave Fleischer released their animated sound 'Song Car-Tunes' using the DeForest Phonofilm process. In 1928, Disney utilized the Powers Cinephone process to synchronize *Steamboat Willie*. Fleischer Studios, Inc. returned to sound production with *Noah's Lark* in 1929. Disney then signed a contract with Technicolor, giving him exclusive rights for animation to the three-colour Technicolor process. This was used in Disney's *Flowers and Trees* (1932). The Fleischer Studios, unable to gain access to three-colour technology, made do with the bichromatic Cinecolor and two-colour Technicolor processes. In order positively to differentiate his colour films from those of Disney, Max Fleischer introduced the three-dimensional Stereoptical Process in his first colour film, *Poor Cinderella*, in 1934. After three-colour Technicolor became available to Fleischer Studios, Inc., the company moved to longer animated films with *Popeye the Sailor Meets Sindbad the Sailor* (1936). Walt Disney Productions countered with the development of the Multiplane

²⁵ 'Fleischer advances technical art', *Moving Picture World*, 7 June 1919; 'The inkwell man', *The New York Times*, 22 February 1920, p. 9; 'Offers new series of "Out of Inkwell"', unidentified clipping, c1921, Margaret J. Winkler Papers, Film Study Centre, The Museum of Modern Art, NY; Milton Wright, 'Inventors who have achieved commercial success', *Scientific American*, vol. 136, no. 4 (1927), p. 249; Max Fleischer, US Patent no. 1,819,883, August 1931.

²⁶ Certificate of Incorporation of the Red Seal Pictures Corporation, 7 September 1923, New York City County Clerk's Office; M. J. Winkler advertisement, *The Film Daily*, 11 May 1924; 'Alice's Wild West Show', *The Film Daily*, 16 March 1924; 'Alice's Wild West Show' and 'Alice's Day at Sea', *Motion Picture World*, 10 May 1924; Walt Disney, 'Letter to Margaret Winkler', in David R. Smith, 'Up to date in Kansas City', *Funnyworld*, no. 19 (1978), p. 33; George Winkler, interviews with the author, 25 May 1991 and 26 May 1991; Ron Magliozi, 'Notes for a history of Winkler pictures', unpublished ms, 1991.

camera, beginning in 1935 and culminating with its use in *The Old Mill* (1937). Several months later, the Disney studio released the feature *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1938). By coopting the dominant feature-length format of classical Hollywood cinema, Disney differentiated his product, as he had similarly done with the earlier 'Alice Comedies'. His competitors could follow, or be left with what would be perceived as a less innovative, inferior, product. This is when the house of cards began to collapse. Following on the success of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, Max and Dave Fleischer drove themselves into insolvency by combining all of their technologies in the feature-length *Gulliver's Travels* (1939) and *Mr Bug Goes to Town* (1941). Disney narrowly escaped doing the same by applying his expensive technologies to the money-losing *Pinocchio* (1940), *Fantasia* and *Bambi* (1942).²⁷

The result of this institutional pattern of product differentiation closely follows the outcome predicted by the Prisoner's Dilemma. The Prisoner's Dilemma model does allow a competitor to win a particular round, as Disney did with the production of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. But such victories are minor anomalies in comparison with the long-term outcome of a competitive, noncooperative strategy. With the exception of the anomalous success of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, technological differentiation of product did not provide benefit to either company. Walt Disney Productions remained viable in the 1930s and early 1940s largely because of income obtained from a stock offer and from ancillary business interests, such as product licensing, books, music and revenue from comic strip and art sales, rather than because of income resulting directly or indirectly from the development of the Multiplane camera.²⁸

Much less of the Fleischer Studios' income came from ancillary interests. Although some attempt had been made to market products based on Fleischer animated characters, the merchandising rights for the company's popular series of 'Popeye the Sailor' cartoons were held by King Features Syndicate. Cost controls imposed upon Fleischer Studios, Inc. that limited the company's use of new technology helped maintain that company's profitability. For example, Paramount contracts with the Fleischers specified that 'Popeye the Sailor' cartoons be black and white as late as 1942. This was seven years after Disney had completely converted to Technicolor production. Paramount's constraints kept production costs of 'Popeye' down to \$16,500 per film, and effectively limited the use of the Stereoptical Process in these films. Fleischer one-reel colour films were to cost no more than \$30,000, with only their two-reel specials and the first 'Superman' cartoon exceeding this figure. Budgets were considerably less than the \$40,000 to \$50,000 typically spent on a one-reel film by Walt Disney Productions. When these financial controls were relaxed for the Fleischer feature-length

²⁷ The \$2,595,379 cost of *Pinocchio* was estimated to be in excess of one million dollars over projected income in the year of its release, while *Dumbo*, which made less use of the expensive Multiplane camera, cost only \$600,000 and generated profit. Much of the studio's income was dependent on short subjects, which did not make extensive use of Multiplane, and income from ancillary sources, such as comic strips, licensing fees, etc. Walt Disney Productions lost \$1,259,798 in 1940, \$789,297 in 1941 and \$191,069 in 1942. *Annual Report Fiscal Year Ended September 28, 1940* (Burbank: Walt Disney Productions, 1940), p. 3; *Annual Report Fiscal Year Ended September 27, 1941* (Burbank: Walt Disney Productions, 1941), p. 2; *Annual Report Fiscal Year ended October 3, 1942* (Burbank: Walt Disney Productions, 1942), pp. 2, 10; 'Disney loss cut', *Variety*, vol. 145, no. 7 (1942), p. 20; 'Walt Disney: great teacher', *Fortune*, vol. 26, no. 12 (1942), p. 154.

²⁸ 'The big bad wolf', *Fortune*, vol. 10, no. 5 (1934), p. 94; *Annual Report Fiscal Year Ended September 28, 1940*, p. 5.

²⁹ The Stereoptical Process was most generally used in the two-reel 'Specials' and in films of the more expensive 'Color Classics' series, such as *Little Dutch Mill* (1934) or *Hawaiian Birds* (1936). Isolated examples of the Stereoptical Process can be found in lower-budget black and white Fleischer cartoons. Examples include the 'Betty Boop' film *Housecleaning Blues* (1937) or the 'Popeye' cartoons *King of the Mardi Gras* (1935) and *Little Sweet Pea* (1936). More generally, depth effects were provided by exaggerated perspective drawing, as seen in the 'Talkartoon' *Sky scraping* (1930) or the 'Popeye' *A Dream Walking* (1934). In an attempt to control the cost of production for the Fleischer features, three-dimensional effects were limited to an opening sequence of a ship in *Gulliver's Travels* and a descending camera track through the model of a city in *Mr Bug Goes to Town*. Most depth effects in the features were achieved through a return to exaggerated perspective drawing. After the returns from *Gulliver's Travels*, the Fleischer Studios, Inc. owed Paramount \$100,000 in payment of loans. Following the disastrous release of *Mr Bug Goes to Town*, Paramount was owed \$473,000. King Features Syndicate, Inc. and Fleischer Studios, Inc., *Agreement*, 17 February 1937, pp. 15, 19; Botsford to Holman, Keough, Fleischer and Fleischer, *Agreement*, pp. 2, 3, 11, 12; 'The big bad wolf', pp. 91, 94; 'Instead of getting \$80,000, Disney says he'll lose 56G on US tax short', *Variety*, vol. 145, no. 10 (1942), p. 19; Richard Murray, *Deposition*, Dave Fleischer v AAP Inc., et al, US District Court Southern District of New York, 6 December 1957.

³⁰ Walt Disney, 'Growing pains', *American Cinematographer*, vol. 22, no. 3 (1941), p. 106.

³¹ Max Fleischer to Jimmy (Shamus) Culhane, c December 1945, Collection of Shamus Culhane, p. 2.

response to *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, the Fleischers fell into the trap of the Prisoner's Dilemma. *Gulliver's Travels* went over budget, and Fleischer Studios, Inc. entered a crisis from which it never emerged.²⁹

Other factors contributed to the fiscal woes of the Fleischer Studios, Inc. and Walt Disney Productions. After suffering a financial blow from a lengthy 1937 strike, the Fleischers were confronted with the expense of moving their company from New York to a new facility in the non-union labour environment of Miami, Florida during 1938. Walt Disney spent much of the profit of *Snow White* on his new studio in Burbank. Shortly after this, Disney also had to cope with a bitter strike in 1941. Profits of both companies were adversely affected by the loss of continental European and Asian markets during World War II, as well as by currency restrictions in the United Kingdom. Some attempt was made to adjust to these conditions by an expansion of activity in Central and South America. Despite these factors, the Prisoner's Dilemma suggests that technological innovation was a decisive determinant in the sinking fortunes of the Disney and Fleischer studios. The continuation of technological innovation by these two animation companies contrasted with the practice of the dominant feature-length, live-action film industry. In the era of mature oligopoly, the feature film industry sharply reduced its degree of reliance on technological innovation for purposes of product differentiation following a period of expensive innovation in competing sound, colour, three-dimensional and widescreen technologies from 1926 to 1935. With the standardization of sound and colour technologies, and with the abandonment of widescreen and 3-D, the feature film industry entered into a period of financial stability marked by relatively little technological innovation until after World War II. In comparison with the experience of the Fleischer and Disney companies, the stability of this dominant sector was relatively unaffected by the loss of markets during wartime.

Nevertheless, the importance of technological differentiation to the financial wellbeing of the institution was an article of faith held by Walt Disney and Max Fleischer. Both men clearly believed in an ideology of progress, wherein technological development played a key role. In a 1941 article in *American Cinematographer*, Disney stated: '... the public will pay for quality. ... Our business has grown with and by technical achievements. Should this technical progress ever come to a full stop, prepare the funeral oration for our medium.'³⁰ Shortly after the collapse of Fleischer Studios, Inc., Max Fleischer recalled his career as a series of successful technical innovations, culminating with his introduction of 'the very first attempt to incorporate a third dimensional effect in cartoons ... by the "Setback" method of photography'.³¹

Was the Multiplane camera a competitive response to the

Fleischer system? Preliminary research strongly suggests that early Multiplane camera development did imitate the Stereoptical Process. Although few documents on Multiplane development exist, Disney employee Ken Anderson recalled that in 1935 he created a three-dimensional model of a door for an early horizontal version of the Disney 3-D process. When photographed with foreground cel images, the result showed Snow White interacting with the three-dimensional set. A search at the Disney Archives has failed to document why this earlier system was abandoned, although the need to avoid patent infringement seems a likely reason. It should be remembered that both Ub Iwerks's three-dimensional apparatus and a later Walt Disney Productions model of the Multiplane camera developed for the last shot of *Fantasia* used the same horizontal format as the earlier Fleischer process. The Disney Horizontal Multiplane camera also had the potential for the use of three-dimensional materials or mockups.³²

At the time of their introduction, these innovations were perceived as technologically differentiating one studio's product from those of others. 'News stories' planted by Paramount pointed out that Max Fleischer's 'camera wizardry' brought about an advance over the earlier two-dimensional animation system. *Popeye the Sailor Meets Sindbad the Sailor* was publicized as the 'first two-reel, full-color, three-dimensional film'. *The Old Mill* received an Academy Award for best animated short subject, and the Disney studio was awarded another Oscar for 'technical achievement' in the development of the Multiplane camera. As had been the case with the Stereoptical Process, the Multiplane camera was extensively publicized as an important technological innovation.³³

The publicity and awards given to these technologies might seem to support the evolutionary or teleological argument that their development was an advance on the road to mimesis. Yet, as mentioned above, the Multiplane camera and the Stereoptical Process were used infrequently after a few years, which suggests that they were more of a dead end than the road of progress. The economic consequences of using such expensive technologies simply did not justify their continued use.

Did economics stand in the way of aesthetic evolution? Historical contentions that the Stereoptical Process was developed for reasons of mimesis are arguable.³⁴ Max Fleischer maintained that he was opposed to mimesis in animation during the time in which he developed the Stereoptical Process.

During the span from 1914 to 1936, I made efforts to retain the 'cartoony' effect. . . . Let us assume we desire to create the last word in a true to life portrait. We examine the subject very carefully and religiously follow every shape, form and expression.

32 Use of this horizontal version of the Multiplane camera was limited to the last shot of the 'Night on a Bald Mountain/Ave Maria' sequence of *Fantasia*. Ken Anderson, interview by David Smith, 5 September 1975, Walt Disney Archives; Thomas and Johnston, *Disney Animation*, p. 264.

33 'Popeye slams foes into third dimension through Fleischer's camera wizardry', and 'Popeye knocks Bluto into third dimension', in *Popeye the Sailor Meets Sindbad the Sailor Pressbook* (New York: Paramount, 1936), pp. 13, 15; Schickel, *The Disney Version*, pp. 164-5; 'Three-ply Mickey coming: Disney announces new process for tri-dimensional films', *The New York Journal-American*, 28 May 1937; Frank S. Nugent, 'This Disney Whirl', *The New York Times*, 29 January 1939, p. 5.

34 See Russell George, 'Some spatial characteristics of the Hollywood cartoon' for considerations of the differences between live action and cartoon realism.

³⁵ Fleischer to Culhane, c December 1945; Richard Fleischer, interview with author, 6 October 1990.

³⁶ Maltin, *Of Mice and Magic*, p. 114; George, 'Some spatial characteristics . . .', p. 315; *Popeye the Sailor Meets Sindbad the Sailor Pressbook*, pp. 13, 15.

³⁷ William Garity, 'The production of animated cartoons', *The Journal of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers*, vol. 20, no. 4 (1933), p. 309.

We faithfully reproduce every light, shade and highlight. Upon completion of this grand effort, we compare our result with a photograph. . . . What have we now? Nothing at all. We have simply gone the long way around to create something which the camera can produce in seconds. In my opinion, the industry must pull back. Pull away from tendencies toward realism. It must stay in its own back yard of 'The Cartoonist's Cartoon'. The cartoon must be a portrayal of the expression of the true cartoonist, in simple, unhampered cartoon style. The true cartoon is a great art in its own right. It does not require the assistance or support of 'Artiness'. In fact, it is actually hampered by it.³⁵

Examination of the use of the Stereoptical Process in Fleischer films does tend to corroborate Max Fleischer's remarks. In no film is the Stereoptical Process consistently used as a background element. While there may be economic reasons for this, the effect on the screen is a rupture of the films' visual continuity. Through an alternation of three-dimensional and two-dimensional backgrounds, attention is drawn to the Stereoptical Process as a technological gimmick. Rather than reinforcing the realist codes of classical Hollywood cinema, the Fleischer use of the three-dimensional setback system appears to have been employed chiefly as a form of spectacle that contrasted with the traditional appearance of cel animation used in the rest of the film. Leonard Maltin and Russell George suggest that audiences of the time would not be aware that three-dimensional sets had been used. It is difficult, if not impossible, to reconstruct the perceptions of an audience more than fifty years ago. Examination of contemporary promotional literature released by the Fleischer Studios, Inc. and its distributor, Paramount, indicates that every attempt was made to draw the audience's attention to the use of this new technology. The opening credits of many Fleischer films included a title line heralding the use of the Stereoptical Process.³⁶

The employment of the Stereoptical Process in animated cartoons was consistent with the use of other Fleischer processes with a mimetic potential, such as the Rotoscope. In both *Gulliver's Travels* and *Mr Bug Goes to Town*, the human world and the worlds of Lilliput or the insects are defined by their degree of determination by photographic images. Both *Gulliver* and the 'Human Ones' are rotoscoped. Most of the Lilliputians and the insects are not. The juxtaposition of the two styles emphasizes the artificiality or 'cartooniness' of the film. A similar juxtaposition informs the visual discourse involving the Stereoptical Process.

The Multiplane camera was first developed for use in Disney's 'Silly Symphonies' series, of which William Garity – head of the studio team that developed Multiplane – once stated: 'It is the present intent to maintain this series in the realm of the unreal'.³⁷

The Multiplane camera maintained a uniform use of flat surfaces with some space separating each level of artwork. Lacking 'real' three-dimensional surfaces (such as angles or curves) that would contrast with the flat plane of conventional animation cels, the Multiplane camera's two-dimensional surfaces may not seem to offer as great a potential for visual discontinuity with conventional cel animation as did the three-dimensional backgrounds employed by the Stereoptical Process. Nevertheless, the most often cited examples of Multiplane use – the long tracking shots in *The Old Mill*, or the camera descent to Pinocchio's doorway as he prepares to leave for school – emphasize the camera's potential for spatial realism.

These three-dimensional effects were not the only reason for the development of the Multiplane camera. According to William Garity, a major reason for the camera's development was that 'almost any scene can be broken down in such a way that lighting, colour and optical control is achieved over any part or all of the scene. This control would not be at all practical if the technique was confined to a single plane'.³⁸ Special effects were a primary consideration in the design of the apparatus. The Multiplane camera was used for sequences that were often anything but mimetic, or stylistically continuous with the rest of the picture. Disney layout artist Kendall O'Connor recalls that sections of the cartoony 'Dance of the Hours' sequence in *Fantasia* and the surreal 'Pink Elephants' fantasy sequence in *Dumbo* were shot with the Multiplane camera. This was done to take advantage of the superior control that the Multiplane camera gave in achieving a higher degree of artificial stylization. For example, the device's detailed control of light on each plane permitted the use of a better flat black background for the stylized shenanigans of the 'Pink Elephants' sequence.³⁹ The episodic quality of *Fantasia* emphasized the ruptures and contrasts among disparate styles – such as the abstraction of 'Toccata and Fugue in D Minor', the 'cartoony' burlesque of 'Dance of the Hours', and the realistic drama of natural evolution in 'The Rite of Spring'. As Disney films became more discontinuous in terms of narrative and graphic style during the 1940s, those Multiplane camera sequences that emphasized three-dimensionality increasingly tended to create discontinuity when juxtaposed with more 'cartoony' elements, or with live action, as seen in *Saludos Amigos* (1943), *The Three Caballeros* (1945), or *Song of the South* (1946).⁴⁰

Conventional wisdom has it that American animation was rescued from the aesthetic dead end of realism by Warner Bros and UPA animators. Steve Schneider claims that the stylized backgrounds and movement in Chuck Jones's *The Dover Boys* (1942) heralded a new beginning in American animation as 'the first cartoon since the rise of Disney in which the demands of realism were almost entirely banished. . . . Later in the 1940s, some of the founders of the UPA studio cited the film as an inspiration for their innovations'.⁴¹ Ralph

³⁸ William Garity, *The Disney Multiplane Crane*, n.d., Walt Disney Archives, c1938, p. 3.

³⁹ A. Kendall O'Connor, interview with the author, 24 May 1991.

⁴⁰ For a closer analysis of the separate discourses in *Dumbo*, see Mark Langer, 'Regionalism in Disney animation: Pink Elephants and *Dumbo*', *Film History*, vol. 4, no. 4 (1990), pp. 305–21.

⁴¹ Steve Schneider, *That All Folks! The Art of Warner Bros Animation* (New York: Henry Holt, 1990), p. 73.

⁴² Ralph Stephenson, *The Animated Film*, pp. 48–9. Similar evaluations are found in George, 'Some spatial characteristics . . .', p. 306; Maltin, *The Disney Films*, p. 274.

⁴³ Schneider, *That's All Folks!*, p. 60.

Stephenson identified this new trend in post World War II animation as 'moving away from realism. . . . UPA started this'.⁴²

Such considerations look for continuity within the output of a studio. For example, while Schneider hails the change in Jones's style in 1942, elsewhere in his book he observes somewhat contradictorily that Jones's 'Sniffles' cartoons 'stayed heavily under the Disney influence . . . [with] . . . slower and atmospheric pacing . . . realistic backgrounds, and a striving for "cuteness" throughout'. Jones continued to make 'Sniffles' cartoons in this style through 1946.⁴³

Similar problems arise in the categorization of Disney and late Fleischer films as 'realistic'. Histories portray the Disney and Fleischer studios as late-comers to the tendency towards abstraction and stylization pioneered elsewhere. Animation historians confirm the existence of unified styles within the products of these companies, uninfluenced by the production of other animation studios until the artistic mantle passed to Warner Bros and UPA in the 1942 to 1949 period. Earlier Disney and Fleischer abstractions, or stylizations, such as the apparent breaking and splicing of the film image in Fleischer's *Goonland*, the distorted images in the hall of mirrors in Disney's *Bone Trouble*, the story presented as still sketches in the 'Baby Weems' sequence in *The Reluctant Dragon*, the self-reflexive antics and lyrics in the 'Pink Elephants' sequence of *Dumbo*, or the simple outlines, flat background and electronic, percussive score of the 'Jitterbug' sequence in *Mr Bug Goes to Town*, all appear to exist outside of history. The Stereoptical Process and the Multiplane camera do not obliterate these tendencies – they coexist with them, clash with them, complement them, and even support them.

No single historical methodology can account for all aspects of any item from the past. This study is not intended as a theory of history, even in the restricted context of animation technology. My observations merely suggest how previous treatments of the subject fail to account fully for the development and use of three-dimensional processes. Evolutionary or teleological theories do not account for the discontinuities in the use of the Stereoptical Process and the Multiplane camera, nor does the 'great man' theory account for the institutional structure of the American animation industry. Aesthetic changes do not necessarily occur in a coherent, linear manner. All of these methodologies assume a kind of rational, continuous unfolding of technological history. As this study demonstrates, innovation takes place in a context far more complex and fragmented than that envisaged in previous considerations of the Stereoptical Process and Multiplane camera.

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Disney animation and the business of childhood

DAVID FORGACS

What is a Disney baby? Disney Babies are a line of toddler products (soft toys, clothes, colouring books and the like) made by fifty different firms under licence to the Walt Disney Company which bear the images of baby versions of Disney characters: a baby Mickey and Minnie, baby Pluto, and so on. They are designed to be irresistible to new parents. A Disney baby is also what you were if you were born at any date after 1925, were taken as a child to see Disney films, used to read Disney comics and owned some Disney merchandise such as a Mickey Mouse watch. Disney babies of the latter kind grow ideally into Disney adults. Disney adults take their children to Disney films and theme parks, buy them Disney merchandise and subscribe to the Disney Channel. In the evening they may unwind watching a Touchstone film on home video.

Am I a Disney adult? Not exactly. I was a Disney baby who grew up to find some bits of Disney material bland, icky (like Disney Babies) or distasteful and other bits endlessly fascinating and beautiful. I do not shower my children with Disney products but neither do I believe they need to be kept away from them. I do not see Disney as a cultural arm of American imperialism or a beast within us (Ariel Dorfman¹) or as a 'cultural Chernobyl' (as someone in the French cultural ministry is reported as having described Euro Disney); and though I think the Disney theme parks present a very narrow, sanitized, version of US history, I do not see them as 'an alibi for the American public's unwillingness to look an unprocessed, non-showbiz world directly in the eye' (Russell Davies²). I dislike Disney's corporate wealth and power because it

1 'The enemy is inside, and we find it hard to distinguish him from some of our innermost thoughts and nurturings'; 'the dominant media and their fictions are somewhat like the Medusa that Perseus had to destroy. . . . Reflect the head in the mirror; accept and understand it; cut it off.' Ariel Dorfman, *The Empire's Old Clothes: What the Lone Ranger, Babar and Other Innocent Heroes do to our Minds* (London: Pluto Press, 1983), pp. 207, 209.

2 Russell Davies, 'Disney's world: "Dreams are always in bad taste"', *The Listener*, 16 February 1984, p. 9.

allows its products to monopolize and crowd out markets that might otherwise be occupied by others' products, but I have derived a lot of pleasure from Disney products, and in particular from the animated films.

The Walt Disney Company would certainly like people to grow into Disney adults and have Disney babies of their own. In the course of the 1980s it made a remarkable turnaround in its fortunes to become one of the world's highest grossing entertainments corporations. It still has its headquarters on the lot in Burbank which Walt built in 1940 with the profits from *Snow White*, with roads called Mickey Avenue and Dopey Drive and a building with a pseudo-classical pediment supported by giant sculptures of the seven dwarfs. But nowadays it is staffed by executives who spend their days discussing things like company mergers and hotel building and planning the release dates and merchandising tie-ins of films and home videos. Of the Company's three main divisions – theme parks, filmed entertainment and consumer products – 46 per cent of its revenues and 53 per cent of its profits in 1991 came from the first, 42 per cent and 27 per cent from the second, 12 per cent and 20 per cent from the third.³ These divisions synergise to perfection: Disney and Touchstone films provide the shops in the theme parks with merchandise; the parks (including the MGM Studios park at Walt Disney World, a version of which is to be opened at Euro Disney in 1996) stimulate an interest in the films and nostalgia for the golden age of Hollywood – a nostalgia which fits very well both with Touchstone's line in retro movies and with Disney's constant recycling of animated material and characters going back to the 1930s.

The secret of Disney's current success lies largely in its skilful handling of these relays between past and present, adult, adolescent and child. All the relays – the feelings of parental protectiveness evoked by Disney Babies, Wuzzles and Gummi Bears; nostalgia for the national past stimulated by Main Street, New Orleans Square or Frontierland in the theme parks; memories of the 'classic' animated films kept alive by constant promotions of old titles and compilations of extracts on home video and by frequent theatrical rereleases and regular television shows – depend primarily on the adult consumer as provider of revenue. Children are a major source of Disney income, but only indirectly: it is adults who spend money on them. Disney promotions, whether for films, theme parks or consumer goods, are therefore targeted at the family unit. Disneyland was originally sold to financiers in 1953 as 'a place for parents and children to share pleasant times in one another's company'⁴ and the Company would like now to recapture this ideal. For vice-chairman Roy O. Disney: 'There was a period of cynicism that we went through in the sixties and seventies with Vietnam and all of those things that were tearing families apart in a lot of ways. I think that psychology has begun to disappear and families are seeing that being

3 *The Walt Disney Company 1991 Annual Report*, p. 50.

4 From a description of Disneyland written by Bill Walsh, September 1953, quoted in Bob Thomas, *The Walt Disney Biography* (London: New English Library, 1977), p. 197.

5 From an interview on *The Media Show*, Channel Four, 17 December 1989.

6 Ibid.; Price nevertheless managed to get 'fucking', 'shit' and 'humping with your fist' into the final version.

7 For contemporary interest in the technique, for which Disney's chief engineer William Garity was largely responsible, see Andrew R. Boone, 'When Mickey Mouse speaks', *Scientific American*, vol. 148, no. 3 (1933), pp. 146–7.

8 Richard Schickel, *The Disney Version: The Life, Times, Art and Commerce of Walt Disney*, 2nd edition revised and updated (London: Pavilion, 1986), p. 166.

9 E. M. Forster, 'Mickey and Minnie', *The Spectator*, 19 January 1934, p. 82.

together is a good thing to do.'⁵ If you write a script for Touchstone Pictures, Disney's adult releasing entity, you have to make it acceptable as family entertainment. As Richard Price, Scorsese's screenwriter for *The Color of Money* (1985), put it: 'You can't have a lot of four-letter words in a movie when you've got Walt Disney hovering over you'.⁶

Disney business was not always centred on the myth of family togetherness or the parent–child relay. The toddler imagery of Disney Babies, in particular, is a recent development, part of a merchandising fashion based on cute baby characters which includes Muppet Babies (also owned by Disney since its takeover of Jim Henson Productions) and Care Bears, and it represents a point of arrival in a gradual shift towards the cutifying of Disney products which can be traced from the 1930s onwards. The first Disney cartoons, the shorts produced in the 1920s, were made not for a children's or family market – there was no such thing in that period – but for a general audience which included some children. Many of the gags reused items from the silent comedy repertoire which were known to work well on adult audiences. This remained true also of many gags in the 1930s Silly Symphonies, like the collapsing jalopy in *Mickey's Service Station* (1935), Goofy's Harold Lloyd act in *Clock Cleaners* (1937) and the ubiquitous fat lady as figure of mirth who underlies Clara Cluck in *Mickey's Grand Opera* (1936), the adult elephants in *Father Noah's Ark* (1933) and *Dumbo* (1941) and the pirouetting hippos in *Fantasia* (1940). There were also incidental visual gags that small children would have missed: for instance in *The Three Little Pigs* (1933) the bricks on the third pig's house are held together by 'Wolf-proof cement' and the portrait of 'Father' on the wall shows a string of sausages.

It is also important to remember the extraordinary impact made on adult audiences at the very beginning of the sound era by the perfect synchronization between syncopated music and animated drawings which was the chief innovation of the Mickey Mouse and Silly Symphonies cartoons. The soundtrack was laid down first and pictures were then painstakingly coordinated with it, frame by frame, bar by bar, beat by beat.⁷ This was the period when King George V allegedly 'refused to go to the movies unless a Mickey Mouse film was shown',⁸ when Mussolini received Walt Disney on his 1935 visit to Rome and gave him a signed photograph, and when E. M. Forster wrote: 'At present Mickey is everybody's god, so that even members of the Film Society cease despising their fellow members when he appears'.⁹ As late as 1940–41 Eisenstein could write a eulogy on the 'plasmatic' quality of Disney animation, the beauty of its use of Technicolor and its protean, totemistic anthropomorphism, which he saw as at once a regression to a prelogical state and a utopian realization of a world of complete freedom:

One of Disney's most amazing things is his *Underwater Circus*. What purity and clarity of soul is needed to make such a thing! To what depths of untouched nature is it necessary to dive with bubbles and bubble-like children in order to reach such absolute freedom from all categories, all conventions. In order to be like children.¹⁰

But at the same time the first signs of Disney cuteness began to appear in some of the Silly Symphonies, from baby Otto in *Birds in the Spring* (1933) to *Elmer Elephant* (1936), *Little Hiawatha* (1937) and the pudgy babies with pink bottoms peeking out of nightsuits in *Wynken, Blynken and Nod* (1938). Cuteness was repeatedly emphasized as a desirable quality in Disney story conferences during the 1930s:

These little pig characters look as if they would work up very cute. . . . Use cute voices that could work into harmony and chorus effects when they talk together.¹¹

Walt points out that the animators must always try to feel the cuteness in the personal treatment of all these characters. . . . Dopey could become very grotesque, unless he is kept in a cute little manner.¹²

We have a lot of little dwarfs all round and cute and solid, and if we make this girl round and cute and solid, you would like her better on the screen.¹³

I think where Pinocchio's sniffing it might be cute if the little guy [the cricket] says BLOW and HERE, HAVE A BIRDSEED.¹⁴

I feel this – give that song to them – there's interest to it – there always is to a song, and it's cute.¹⁵

Sea horses will be very cute swimming in the water.¹⁶

That is going to be cuter than hell in this, when she [the pet goldfish] brushes against the finger, like a cat.¹⁷

None of Disney's biographers explains this move towards cuteness in the Studio's animation work. To see something as cute means to feel a nurturant affection for it as one does for a baby. This feeling can be brought out in children as well in adults. To develop cuteness therefore means to develop a set of affective relays between adult and baby or child and baby. The ethologist Stephen Jay Gould has described the changing design of Mickey Mouse since his first screen appearances as one of infantilization or 'reverse evolution'. Mickey in other words becomes more and more babylike, and his baby appearance brings out an affectionate-protective response in adults: 'childlike features can stimulate strong feelings of affection in adult

10 S. M. Eisenstein, 'On Disney', in *Walt Disney*, catalogue of the Venice retrospective (Venice: Edizioni La Biennale di Venezia, 1985), p. 25.

11 Quoted in Thomas, *The Walt Disney Biography*, p. 88.

12 Walt Disney Archives (hereafter abbreviated WDA), 'Story conference, personalities of the seven dwarfs, November 3rd, 1936', p. 7 (Perce Pearce). I am grateful to Disney's archivist, David R. Smith, for his kind assistance.

13 WDA, 'Story conference, discussion of Snow White's personality, November 11th, 1936', p. 1 (Hamilton Luske).

14 WDA, 'Pinocchio story meeting. Sequence 4-D and 4-DD, Friday September 16th, 1938', p. 6 (Walt Disney).

15 WDA, 'Pinocchio story meeting. Sequence 4-B. Marionette show. Friday September 23rd, 1938', p. 1 (Walt Disney).

16 WDA, 'Story meeting notes. F#3 – Pinocchio. Sequence 10. Friday October 28th, 1938' (Walt Disney).

17 WDA, 'Story meeting on Pinocchio F-3, Sequence 10.1. Fri. Dec. 2nd, 1938', p. 3 (Walt Disney).

18 Stephen Jay Gould, 'Mickey Mouse meets Konrad Lorenz', *Natural History*, vol. 88, (May 1979), pp. 30, 32, 34, 36. Gould uses three measures of this reverse evolution: the eyes become larger relative to the head, the head becomes larger relative to the body, and the forehead becomes larger because of an increased distance between the nose and the anterior ear.

19 Quoted in Karen Merritt and Russell Merritt, 'Mythic mouse', *Griffithiana*, no. 34 (1988), pp. 60, 61.

20 'Remarks on the popularity of Mickey Mouse' in *American Imago* 1940, quoted in John Grant, *Encyclopedia of Walt Disney's Animated Characters* (London: Hamlyn 1987), p. 27.

21 WDA, 'Story conference, discussion of *Snow White's* personality, November 11th, 1936', p. 1.

22 From an interview in 'The Art of Walt Disney', producer/director Alan Benson, *The South Bank Show*, London Weekend Television, 25 September 1988.

humans'.¹⁸ For Maurice Sendak, Mickey is both babylike and sexual: 'Everybody loves to hold a baby. to touch it. to kiss it. to lick it; and Mickey has that same quality . . . there's also in Mickey's gleeful beam a sexual freedom, a kind of pleasure in early infantile sexuality which is utterly uninhibited'.¹⁹ For psychoanalyst Fritz Moellenhoff, writing in 1940, Mickey was 'a mouse and a phallus'.²⁰ But it seems to me that the sexual quality of Mickey Mouse diminishes as he evolves in reverse. As he became more infantile in appearance he also became less wild, more intrepid (Mickey the explorer) and finally more bourgeois and more boring, with a house, a dog and two little nephews, Morty and Ferdie. His evolution in this direction was assisted by his separate development as a comic-strip character in the drawings of Floyd Gottfredson. By the time he was killed off as a star of short cartoons in 1953 and began his long afterlife as merchandising icon and international symbol of goodwill, he had come a very long way from the unruly rubber-hose character of *Steamboat Willie* (1928) who has his torso pulled out onto the deck like a long sausage by Pete and stuffs it back into his pants; who force-feeds straw to a cow with a pitchfork, plays xylophone on its teeth and tongue; swings a cat round by the tail to make it howl; and pulls a goose's neck to make it trumpet from its beak.

The traits of cuteness or babyishness that developed in the later Mickey Mouse – saucer eyes, round face, pudgy body – were also applied to the characters in the feature-length animations, though the artists strove to keep them just this side of excessive exaggeration. 'We see this girl with round eyes' Hamilton Luske said at an early *Snow White* story conference, '– just as round as we can make them. If we get too large eyes, like some of the comic strips, she gets into the Betty Boop type.'²¹ Pinocchio has big round eyes, so do Mowgli and more recently the Little Mermaid. Animals were anthropomorphically transformed to resemble human babies: Dumbo, the Dalmatian puppies. Marc Davis, the animator chiefly responsible for the final version of the young Bambi, explained how he deliberately transposed the shape of a baby's head to his drawings of a fawn, enlarging the latter's forehead and shortening the jaw: 'What we wanted to do was to bring in some of these elements that say "youth" and "young" into this little animal'.²²

In so far as they remark on it, writers on Disney tend to represent the changing appearance of the characters as keeping pace with the Studio's technical breakthroughs (first synchronized sound cartoon 1928, first Technicolor cartoon 1932, first short using Multiplane camera 1937, first feature-length cartoon 1937), and to see both as emanating from the creative personality of Walt Disney and his constant drive for innovation, experiment, realism and technical perfection. Yet to tell the story this way is to inflate the personal role of Disney and to beg the question of why he made those choices when he did, why he opted for cuteness and why he

favoured the illusion of three-dimensionality in the animated cartoon. Walt Disney was without doubt a brilliant ideas man and innovator with a forceful personality, but if he made history it was not in conditions of his own making. Among the conditions to which he and his co-workers reacted were the growth in the 1930s of the consumer goods industries and product advertising, the expansion of comics publishing, falling returns from the rentals of short cartoons, competition from cartoons made by other studios, growing conservatism in US society and growing attention to public mores which entered the motion picture industry in the form of the Hays Production Code.

It is likely that the success of character licensing and merchandising, which took off almost immediately after the film debut of Mickey Mouse in 1928, played a part in shifting Disney animation towards both cuteness and a more 'family'-oriented product because it demonstrated the potential of the toys and gadgets market as a source of additional revenue. The syndication to newspapers and magazines of cartoon strips (handled by King Features Syndicate) and the licensing arrangements with foreign publishers probably reinforced this feedback effect on the Studio, because they confirmed the worldwide success of the core Disney characters (Mickey, Goofy, Donald, the Three Little Pigs) and encouraged the Studio to produce more characters like them who could undergo development in the comics and consumer goods markets. Finally, the success of cartoon characters from other studios (Max and Dave Fleischer's Popeye, who made his film debut in 1933; Porky Pig, Daffy Duck, Bugs Bunny and Tweety and Sylvester, who all emerged at Warner Bros in the late 1930s out of the talents of Chuck Jones, Friz Freleng, Tex Avery and Mel Blanc; and Hanna and Barbera's Tom and Jerry at MGM, who appeared in 1940) suggested that US audiences were tiring of Mickey Mouse and Silly Symphonies, that they liked more offbeat humour, ironic characters, fast and violent gags, and that the Disney Studio's efforts at three-dimensional realism might be better served in a different format.

Disney's decision at the end of the 1930s to transfer the Studio's main energies from short cartoons to animated features can thus be seen as a way of reaching out to a new audience, both bigger and different in kind than that for the short cartoons. *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Pinocchio* (1940), *Dumbo*, and *Bambi* (1942) were all designed as films for both young and old – clean, nonviolent, fantasies with songs and happy endings. They were not targeted at a 'family audience' in the modern sense of the term – adults accompanying children as the primary spectators – but over time they helped bring such an audience into being. *Fantasia* was something of an exception to this pattern, an odd hybrid of light entertainment, a would-be cultural movie and an experiment for the

Disney artists in abstract animation suggested by music. In terms of its reception it had a strange reincarnation in the 1960s as a hippy film. Now it is marketed as a children's/family film.

The decision to undertake a feature-length animation resulted from converging pressures. One seems to have been Walt Disney's personal ambition to climb ever higher peaks because they were there. Another was studio economics: the problem of low returns and distribution difficulties with the shorts. During the Depression years motion picture theatres sought to attract audiences by billing double features and these began squeezing short cartoons off the programme. At the same time, the costs of Disney animation were rising, partly as a result of the Studio's own innovations – colour and synchronized sound, a 'Fordist' organization of animated film production with a large team of artists and assistants, the Multiplane camera. If one adds to these costs the distributor's cut (United Artists, which distributed Disney films from 1932 to 1936, took 40 per cent) one can see why the Studio's returns, despite the success of the Silly Symphonies, became insufficient to secure sustained growth. According to Richard Schickel, Disney 'publicly complained that the short subject was far too often short-changed in the marts of his trade' and that his most successful short of the 1930s, *The Three Little Pigs*,

was not really doing very well. It was renting at black-and-white rates, about one third those charged for color films then, even though Technicolor prints were much more expensive to make.

Disney had to pay for more prints to satisfy the demand, prints he felt would not be useful once that demand slackened.²³

In this situation the idea of doing a feature was a gamble – when it was in production *Snow White* became known outside the Studio as 'Disney's folly' – but if it paid off it would mean that feature cartoons could compete on the same market against live-action features for theatrical rentals. *Snow White* cost \$1.5 million to make as against \$50,000 for the average Disney short, but it took \$8 million in receipts on its first run alone.

Snow White may not be the highest grossing film of all time but it must be the most rereleased. Even the features that had unsuccessful first runs (*Pinocchio* and *Bambi* lost export markets because of World War II; *Sleeping Beauty*, released in 1959, was critically panned and netted less than its cost of \$6m) were found to have an immensely long shelf life in that they could be rereleased to fresh audiences in first-run theatres and would all eventually make profits. Walt Disney could not have anticipated quite how long these films would last or how big their eventual profits would be. If one looks at the accumulated theatrical receipts of the main animated features by the mid 1980s (see table), one can see the payoff of this extraordinary longevity. With the rise of the home video market, the

²³ Schickel, *The Disney Version*, pp. 161, 162; Leonard Mosley's *The Real Walt Disney* (London: Grafton Books, 1986) states on the contrary (p. 135) that Disney's switch to colour in 1932 was initially profitable because exhibitors held films for longer and the increased rentals exceeded the increase in production costs. However, Mosley, who is often factually unreliable, gives no evidence for this claim and later concedes that Disney switched decisively to animated features after *Snow White* because he reckoned that 'short cartoons were no longer economically worth while'. (p. 168).

strategy has now been modified so as to stagger theatrical and video release dates in different countries and to synchronize merchandising operations with these releases. For example, *One Hundred and One Dalmatians* (1961) was rereleased theatrically with accompanying merchandise in 1991 in North America and both film and merchandise did very well; however, it has not yet been rereleased in Europe. *Peter Pan* (1953) and *Bambi* are already available on videocassette in the USA but not yet in the UK, where their video release is timed to follow their respective theatrical rereleases in 1992 and 1993. It is very important, with what is after all a limited stock of classics, to control releases carefully and to add new elements to the release strategy, such as limited editions (videocassettes available until a certain date and then withdrawn from stock), special editions (the *Fantasia* videocassette packaged with a book), and new editions (*Fantasia Continued*, a version with some of the original segments replaced with new ones, which is due for theatrical release later in the decade).

Accumulated theatrical receipts of top twelve feature-length Disney animations in 1985, recalculated at constant values (\$m)

Title	Year of release	Total receipts	Receipts at 1985 values
<i>Snow White</i>	1937	41.4	314.6
<i>Pinocchio</i>	1940	32.9	250.0
<i>Fantasia</i>	1940	28.4	216.2
<i>Bambi</i>	1942	28.4	216.2
<i>Lady and the Tramp</i>	1955	36.2	144.8
<i>101 Dalmatians</i>	1961	37.6	135.3
<i>Jungle Book</i>	1967	39.5	130.3
<i>Cinderella</i>	1950	25.6	115.2
<i>Peter Pan</i>	1953	24.5	98.4
<i>Sleeping Beauty</i>	1959	21.4	77.0
<i>Aristocats</i>	1970	18.6	52.0
<i>Sword in the Stone</i>	1963	10.5	36.6

Source: *La Revue du cinéma*, no. 429 (1987), p. 17.

It is remarkable that in this process of recycling and global rereleasing the animated features do not seem to age. They just do not look as old as other old films do. In reality this magic of eternal youth has a lot to do with the way the films are promoted and publicized. Disney is very skilful at presenting its old films as 'classics', at once perennial, timeless fantasies and the standard versions of the stories they adapt. This is greatly assisted by its publication of books, colouring books and other merchandise which

24 Walt Disney Productions, O. B. Johnston to All Foreign Offices, Inter-Office Communication, P-594, 22 June, 1965, 'Use of the name Walt Disney': 'It is perfectly all right to speak of "Walt Disney's Mickey Mouse" or "Walt Disney's Donald Duck" or "Walt Disney's Disneyland". It is quite another thing to say "Walt Disney's Treasure Island" or "Walt Disney's Mary Poppins" or "Walt Disney's Winnie the Pooh". . . . It is not true that Walt created Treasure Island or Mary Poppins or Winnie the Pooh, and we should not present them in book form to the public in ways that suggest, imply or claim that he did.' A copy of this document is in the archive of the Fondazione Mondadori, Milan, Fondo Arnoldo Mondadori: 'Disney, Walt, sc. 38, 17.10.34-27.11.70'.

popularize its versions of the stories and characters over others. How many children now know *Pinocchio* or *Snow White* other than in the Disney versions? How many children, at any rate outside Britain, know Barrie's play or book of *Peter Pan* or the A. A. Milne Winnie the Pooh characters as drawn by E. H. Shepard, as opposed to the Disney versions? Whereas in the 1960s the Disney organization appeared to be sensitive to criticism that it was taking over other people's literary property,²⁴ that sensitivity seems now to have decreased. A book like *Disney's Winnie the Pooh's Christmas* for instance contains no mention or acknowledgement of anyone named Milne or Shepard.

However, it is also the case that the period quality of the early animated features is technically less evident than that of live-action films of the same period. Probably this is because audiences do not automatically check them off against the real world or against the subsequent technical development of colour cinematography in the way that they would with live-action Technicolor films made in the same period, such as *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) or *Gone with the Wind* (1939). By the same token Disney's early 1950s live-action features and true life adventures (*Treasure Island* [1950], *Seal Island* [1953] and so on) look a lot more dated than its animations of the 1930s and 1940s.

This effect of temporal homogenization or dehistoricization of the animated films is part of the same relay of past and present which is central to the success of the Disney product. When adults see these films again they want them to be as they remember them (nostalgia for their own childhood) and at the same time they want them to be fresh and entertaining for their children. But if they look a little harder they will see that everything about these films speaks their period, from their plot and narrative structure to their meticulous visual detail, depth effects, quaint dialogue – especially the slang, their romantic songs, gags and relentless striving for cuteness. All these elements fitted together to constitute the stuff of entertainment for a general audience as Disney envisaged it in the late 1930s. The adoption of 'realism', which can be seen as the logical culmination of the studio's technical and organizational developments during the 1930s (depth shots done with the Multiplane camera, three-dimensionality in characters and objects, lifelike animation of human and animal figures based on life classes and photographs, conventions of filmic narrative such as pans, zooms and edits copied from live-action cinema) was also a logical choice for a product that had to compete for the same part of the market as the live-action features of the 1930s and 1940s. It is perhaps surprising then that these films should still go down so well with audiences today.

Consider the cuteness of the dwarfs in *Snow White*. In the early story sketches for the film they resembled nineteenth-century book illustrations of gnomes. In late sketches and in the finished film they

became more rotund and more infantile in appearance – exactly the process that had already taken place with Mickey Mouse. Dopey in particular came to bear a close resemblance to Mickey: big round eyes, jug handle ears.

In developing the characters of the dwarfs, the animators and story people watched live-action reels of people with achondroplasia in order to get an idea of how they moved. Walt explained:

Dwarfs have short legs and arms, which could be used to great advantage in these characters without making them seem repulsive to the audience. . . . I feel that Dopey is the guy that would have more of the touches of Erny there – long body, shorter legs and arms, built on the same construction as a baby. Dopey would have the same movements as a baby in the way he would get up and the way he falls. . . . George is about the right kind of character for Doc. I think Doc is cuter than Major George is. There is nothing repulsive about Doc.

At one stage one of the dwarfs was to have been called ‘Deafy’ but, according to John Grant, ‘Walt (wisely) decreed that this would not do because deaf people might justifiably take offence on seeing their disability the subject of laughter’.²⁵ The same inhibitions did not extend to people of restricted growth. ‘Almost child-like instead of men’, Les Clark called them; and Hal Adelquist said ‘I like to see these little guys as though they are like little pigs and be able to do the same things a pig would. I understand that the pygmies in Africa are small in stature yet have the same facilities as human beings.’²⁶ The Disney dwarfs are bearded adults who are childlike in their behaviour (they squabble, squeeze up to one another for protection) or who are gags in themselves (Sneezy sneezes, Sleepy dozes) or who are inadequate in their adult roles (Doc gets tongue-tied, Grumpy can’t sustain his antifeminism and falls for Snow White). Either way an adult audience is meant to feel protective towards them, as Snow White does. Essentially they are toys or dolls. Dwarf toy merchandising was simultaneous with the release of film.

I draw attention to this aspect of the film not in order to show it up as scandalous but to emphasize how much it is of its time. Disney and his artists worked within dominant 1930s stereotypes of adults with achondroplasia, they were used to thinking of them as ‘circus freaks’, and they actually saw their bodies as ‘grotesque’, ‘repulsive’, ‘disgusting’, ‘childlike’ and their personalities as infantile and developmentally retarded. Ray Bolger recalled of the hypopituitary adults (‘midgets’) who played the Munchkins in *The Wizard of Oz*: ‘They were considered to be not as bright as other people, even though some of them were terribly bright. So they figured that they were underdeveloped, that they were freaks.’ Assistant dance director Dona Massin said of ‘Munchkin’ Jerry Maren: ‘Even though he was a man, you just wanted to pick him

²⁵ Grant, *Encyclopedia of Walt Disney's Animated Characters*, p. 141.

²⁶ WDA, ‘Story conference. Personalities of the seven dwarfs, November 10, 1936’, p. 2.

27 Both quotations are from Aljean Harmantz, *The Making of the Wizard of Oz*, (New York: Knopf, 1978), pp. 193, 196.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 191.

29 Shamus Culhane, *Talking Animals and Other People*, (New York: St Martin's Press, 1986), pp. 181–2.

30 Quoted in Thomas, *The Walt Disney Biography* p. 99.

up. He was always with some little girl who was almost as cute as he was.²⁷ Because they thought of them as like children, the average-sized adults working on the picture could not think of sexual relations between them as anything other than 'unnatural' and stories circulated about orgies among them at the Culver City Hotel.²⁸ The Disney artists were capable of imagining similar kinds of sexual excess in the seven dwarfs. 'Suddenly, near the end of the picture', one of the animators later recalled,

the tension in the studio was too much. To relieve it, there was a spontaneous avalanche of pornographic drawings from all over the studio. Drawings of Snow White being gang raped by the dwarfs, and mass orgies among the dwarfs themselves. Even the old witch was involved. Some of the drawings were about comic sexual aberrations that Krafft-Ebing would never have dreamed of. The mania went on for about a week, and as suddenly as it started the whole thing stopped. It must have been a form of hysteria brought on by fatigue and the relentless schedule. As far as I know, Walt never heard about it.²⁹

Disney's dwarfs are 'cute' because they are infantile, jolly and circular, and Dopey is additionally cute because he is silly and has a baby face. The basic design of the other dwarfs in the final version is a small circle perched on a large circle. Rotundity connotes goodness and wholesomeness. Snow White is curvacious but plump-faced, whereas the wicked queen is thin. Walt Disney had conceived of her as 'A mixture of Lady Macbeth and the Big Bad Wolf. Her beauty is sinister, mature, plenty of curves.'³⁰ Most other female Disney villains were to be similar in appearance: the stepmother in *Cinderella* (1950), Maleficent in *Sleeping Beauty*, Cruella De Vil in *One Hundred and One Dalmatians* – the latter is so emaciated that her face looks like a death's head. Male villains, on the other hand, could be fat – for instance Stromboli and the Coachman in *Pinocchio*. A fat female villain did not make an appearance until the sea witch Ursula in *The Little Mermaid* (1989).

Pinocchio, like the seven dwarfs, was also rounded out and made more cute as the story developed. The early story sketches and model sheets had him lean, angular and distinctly puppetlike, similar to the way he appeared in early illustrations of Collodi's book. Gradually, like Dopey, he came to bear a family resemblance to Mickey Mouse. In the finished film he wears white gloves and his face moves in squash and stretch fashion so that he hardly looks wooden. Italians were quick to react against this travesty of their beloved children's classic. On 20 March 1940, long before the film was commercially released in Italy, Collodi's grandson, Paolo Lorenzini, served a legal notice on Disney's Italian licensee, Arnoldo Mondadori, for alleged infringement of 'moral copyright': Lorenzini had seen press reports of Disney's adaptation and he was

31 A copy of the defence statement ('atto di controdiffida') prepared by Mondadori's lawyers is among the Disney contracts at Mondadori's offices in Segrate, Milan.

32 Emilio Ceretti, 'Storia e preistoria di Pinocchio', *Cinema*, vol. 1, no. 86 (1940), pp. 50–2; there are similar criticisms in Domenico Purificato, 'Timori per Pinocchio', *Cinema*, no. 69 (1939), pp. 290–1 and Enrico Mazzuoli, 'Pinocchio "hollywoodato"', *Il Regime Fascista*, 19 January 1941.

33 On the nose–penis analogy, see Sander Gilman, 'The Jewish nose' in *The Jew's Body* (NY and London: Routledge, 1991). Gilman observes that 'there was, and had long been, a direct relationship drawn in popular and medical thought between the size of the nose and that of the penis'. (p. 188) Whereas for Freud the relationship between the two organs was symbolic, Wilhelm Fliess nearly killed some of his patients by operating on their noses in an effort to cure sexual dysfunction.

34 Richard Wunderlich and Thomas J. Morrissey, 'The desecration of *Pinocchio* in the United States', paper presented at the annual conference of the Children's Literature Association, Minneapolis, 27–28 March 1981, p. 3.

trying to prevent Mondadori from publishing the story in book or magazine form.³¹ The Italian press reports, themselves based on prerelease publicity, had singled out as particularly offensive the 'Tyrolean cap on Disney's Pinocchio (Collodi was Tuscan) and the 'excessive discretion' of his nose: 'instead of a nose a foot and a half long, he has given him a sweet little turned up nose, which might belong to Dopey or even to Myrna Loy'.³²

These criticisms themselves need to be seen as part of the story of Italian anti-Americanism and cultural chauvinism during the Fascist period, but they are accurate enough about Disney's modifications. The Disney artists did scale down Pinocchio's nose, except for the scene where it grows as he tells lies. The growing nose is like an involuntary erection: Pinocchio's body makes manifest that of which he is ashamed and wishes to hide (the penis, the lie); it is witnessed by the mother (the Fairy) who smiles but at the same time chastises. Since this must be the only scene in the entire Disney repertoire where an erect penis is shown, albeit a symbolic one, it is worth treasuring. But it is also worth noting that, predictably, Disney's Pinocchio has a very cute erection, one which sprouts leaves and a bird's nest, whereas in Collodi Pinocchio's huge nose nearly pokes the Blue-haired Fairy in the eye and it prevents him from getting through the door: in this it is like that other famous phallus in children's literature, Lewis Carroll's Alice. After leaving Pinocchio to cry for 'a good half hour, on account of the nose which no longer passed through the door of the room' (chapter 18), the Blue-haired Fairy sends birds in to peck it down to its normal size again.³³

Richard Wunderlich and Thomas Morrissey, in a study of the various US versions of Collodi's story, argue that what they call the desecration of *Pinocchio* in the United States predates Disney's version: they trace it instead to a series of stage adaptations made in the 1920s and 1930s. The 'desecration' consists of the expurgation of childhood terrors (for instance the shark becomes a whale), a drastic simplification of the image of the child in which all antisocial tendencies are removed (Collodi's puppet was an egotistical brat who had to learn that other people have feelings as important as his own) and the softening and idealizing of the character of Geppetto, who becomes a model parent, ever patient.³⁴

Wunderlich and Morrissey's thesis is interesting because it links the changing versions of *Pinocchio* to the rise of a sentimentalized idea of both childhood and parenthood in interwar America. However, I feel they oversimplify the argument. The character of Disney's Pinocchio is indeed cutely ingenuous rather than subversive or self-centred but the tale remains full of terrors – Stromboli, Pinocchio in the cage, the Coachman, Lampwick's transformation into a donkey, the whale chasing the raft – and it still promotes a Victorian moral about self help, work and the temptations of 'pleasure' and the 'easy life'. It is true that some terrors were

eliminated from the Disney versions of classic stories. In the Grimm version of *Snow White* the queen eats what she believes to be Snow White's lungs and liver brought back by the huntsman, and at the end she dies on being made to dance in red hot iron shoes at Snow White's wedding (Disney himself said he suppressed the second of these episodes because it was too cruel for an animated film). In Collodi's *Pinocchio* the puppet has his feet burned off, he is hanged and left for dead and he bites off and spits out the cat's paw. In Perrault's version of *Sleeping Beauty* there is a whole second half of the story after the awakening of the princess which tells how the prince's mother, an ogress, wants to eat the princess and her children, but the chef serves her animals instead.

However it is a misrepresentation to call the Disney versions tame. The sequence of Snow White lost in the forest, with the branches of trees turning into hands that clutch at her clothing and the logs turning into alligators, is a terrifying representation of panic and threatened rape. Many children also find the transformation scene of the wicked queen taking the potion or the whale chasing the fleeing Pinocchio and Geppetto very frightening. The Disney stories are ultimately not so different from other versions in the way these terrors are finally contained and the evil beings are killed. What is different is the sugariness of the central characters and the addition of cute animal friends to the source tale: the woodland animals in *Snow White* and *Sleeping Beauty*, the mice in *Cinderella*, Figaro and Cleo in *Pinocchio*, and so on.

For me the most interesting modification of *Pinocchio* is that of the figure of the father, because of the way it fits with the question of parent-child relays. Collodi's Pinocchio was not 'born' to Geppetto, as Disney's is, by the magical intervention of the Fairy because the good old man had expressed the wish for a son. He was already present, alive inside a piece of wood which cried out when the carpenter, Maestro Ciliegia, tried to hone it. Collodi's Geppetto was not a carpenter or toymaker: he was just a pauper who asked Ciliegia for a piece of wood with which to make a marionette that could dance, fence and do somersaults so that he could earn 'a crust of bread and a glass of wine'. Ciliegia was only too pleased to get rid of the troublesome piece of wood. What the Disney team's modifications do to the story is to turn it into a myth of patrilineal filiation without the mother; of male parthenogenesis, implicitly assimilated in the film to creativity (Geppetto is a brilliant craftsman). Add to this another of the Disney innovations, Jiminy Cricket (in Collodi, Pinocchio crushes the cricket with a mallet early on and thereafter he returns only as a ghost) and one has a triangle of father, son and male buddy/protector which is also the basic character structure of *Bambi* after Bambi's mother is killed (Great Prince of the Forest, Bambi, Thumper) and, symbolically, of *The Jungle Book* (1967) (Bagheera, Mowgli, Baloo). Alongside these

images of socialization into a male community made up of boys, buddies and/or fathers and absent/dead mothers there are stories of girls who confront witches, bad fairies, cruel stepmothers or other kinds of enchantment in order to be rewarded with true love: *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast* (1991). Each of these stories ends with the child, male or female, reaching a point of maturation and/or separation from parent and buddies, usually – though not always – by pairing with a young adult of the other sex. The danger which opens up in the middle of the story in the form of an actual or threatened separation from the natural parent is neutralized at the end. In stories which end with the passage of the hero or heroine from the world of childhood to that of adulthood, the trauma of the separation from the parent and/or buddies is softened by the fact that the parents/buddies accept and consent to it as part of growing up. For ultimately these are films not about childhood but about its loss. When adults and children watch them together, the films set deep mutual separation anxieties to work and yet offer a reassuring set of resolutions in fantasy of the pain of separation.

It is important to try to be accurate in defining Disney's role in relation to the development of childhood and family entertainment. It was the drift towards cuteness, already present in some of the short films of the 1930s and later greatly enhanced in the animated features, which eventually determined the reshaping of Disney's image into that of a family entertainment business. A studio which had started off making cartoons for distribution alongside adult features gradually shifted into the feature market itself. As it did so, it came to target its products first at the same audience, then at the growing family audience. Disney's entry into television in the 1950s, which was crucial to the development of this audience, coincided with the birth of Disneyland, the first family theme park. Roy Disney got ABC to invest \$500,000 in the park: in exchange the Disney Studio undertook to supply the network with material for a weekly television show. By the 1980s the family audience had become well established, clearly targetable and extremely lucrative. In keeping its products forever young and forever available for this audience, Disney rewrites its own history, either erasing the period quality of its earlier films, or playing on that very period quality as part of the nostalgia industry. Yet these films do also seem capable of mobilizing powerful fantasies about infancy and the pain of leaving childhood. Disney's current success perhaps depends on its family audiences' desire to have these fantasies brought into play.

Cinema in the cinema in Italian films of the fifties: *Bellissima* and *La signora senza camelie*

FRANCESCO CASETTI

Cinema in the cinema

What happens when a film speaks to us in some way or other about itself, about its being cinema, about the universe it inhabits? When it tells a story which takes place in Hollywood or in Cinecittà, when it shows how show business works, or tells the life story of a star? Or when it speaks to us about a film which is being made, is gradually taking shape and is finally shown on the screen – perhaps the very film we are watching and whose vicissitudes provide the theme of the narrative? When, through its use of references or quotations, it tells us what sort of cinema it wants to be part of, what it would like itself to be, what models have inspired it?

In such cases the film acquires a dual dimension: it takes itself or an immediate alter ego as its own object of discourse; it makes a *mise-en-scene* of its own existence; it represents its own nature as representation. It becomes a film about cinema, or a film about film. This can make it a somewhat ambiguous work, in which confession shades into exhibitionism, investigation retreats into reticence, criticism emerges as subtle valorization: the centre of the work is at once determinate and elusive. But whatever the final assessment of their value, such films do have certain undoubted merits.

In the first place they put on show their nature as *symbolic objects*. The situations they present allow us to retrace both the various steps that mark out the life of a film and the various

procedures that give it form. We are present at the birth of an idea, at the elaboration of a project, at the effort of *mise-en-scène*, at the work of montage, at the moment of projection; and above all we see on display the linguistic and expressive choices, the stylistic data, which are at the basis of the film whose making we are being told about – and indeed are at the basis of all films, including the one we are watching. The result is that the film we see before us is forced to show its cards: through the mediation of its alter ego it indicates to us what universe it belongs to, what class of objects it is related to, what processes it springs from, what architecture shapes it. Its conditions of existence as a filmic text thus emerge in full daylight: we see something, and we see what makes it what it is. More precisely, we see a film, and we see what makes it a film. Clearly in this sense films about the cinema are an interesting laboratory for studying the processes of enunciation. What makes a text a text – but in a way that is normally unspoken – here becomes representation, gesture, a moment on display. The evidence may take us down misleading paths, but it does give us a starting point.

Secondly, films about cinema put into focus their nature as *social objects*. They enable us to see both the image that cinema has of itself and the image it gives of itself for public consumption. So on the one hand these films allow filmmakers – directors, scriptwriters, producers, and so on – to go back over their field of activity and, through what they say about it, to cast light on problems and their treatment, on symptomatic moments and everyday practice, curious episodes and key figures. This doubling back over a field of activity – highlighting perhaps the difficulty of shooting a particular scene in contrast to the impression of ease that it affords the spectator, the creativity of direction rather than the expressivity of acting – indicates the vision cinema has of itself: as work and commitment rather than spectacle, as art rather than craft. What emerges is a real self-definition of the phenomenon, the perception it has of its statute of existence, the consciousness with which it looks at itself.

On the other hand, however, this act of self-definition also functions as a public manifesto. In retracing their steps over the field the filmmakers suggest to the spectator what is to be found there. In showing what cinema thinks of itself, the film also shows us what it wants society to think of it. Its aim (no less effective for often being unconscious) is precisely that of leading the public to adopt a certain idea of what cinema is, how it is made, how much effort and how much money it costs, what it is for, how it is to be received, and so forth. In this sense these films are also shop windows full of self-advertisement. For every self-definition (that of the cinema or any other) is also a justification, or attempted justification, at a social level, of the idea that it presents.

Thirdly, these films put into focus their nature as *historical objects*. I don't mean this in the trivial sense that films about the cinema are

particularly liable to become 'dated' quickly. I mean that they are particularly useful for 'putting into perspective' what they have to say about themselves, about other films, about cinema. By excavating their own territory, by observing it and assigning it a value and a definition, they enable us to understand the complex of articulation that is in play. For there is a latent tension, already hinted at, underlying these films. The image which cinema professionals give of their field of activity is itself realized by cinematic means. There is therefore a possible conflict between what is said about what one is saying and the way it is said. The same goes for the linguistic procedures on display: if they are being shown it is thanks to other procedures, which may go in the same direction as the preceding ones (and act as their reflection), but may equally go in a contrary direction (showing something, but through different means). Furthermore, for every aspect brought to light there may be one which remains in shadow, just as for every procedure that is valorized there will be another whose emergence is repressed. And so films about the cinema, like any other metalinguistic discourse, will both reveal and mask, speak and be silent, and will do so as openly as the theme being presented allows. And it is precisely for this reason (because of the density of their 'unconscious', so to speak) that these films emerge as historical documents of particular interest.

These, then, are three reasons for finding these films interesting: their ability to put on display their field of belonging and the procedures that bear on it; their ability to present themselves as documents of a culture's experiences of cinema; and their ability to problematize, through a play of friction and contrast, the moment in which they emerge. Hence the fascination of that 'second theatre', the one which puts staging on the stage, which represents representation, which communicates communication.

In what follows I shall not, obviously, be able to deal with all these aspects. I shall be concentrating on two Italian films of the 1950s, hoping thereby to cast light on the problems associated with the representation of cinema within the cinema.

Why two Italian films of the fifties? This is a decade which has no shortage of works which are directly concerned with cinema or which at least use it as a pertinent background for their narratives. The titles which spring first to mind are Visconti's *Bellissima* (1951), Antonioni's *La signora senza camelie* (1952), Comencini's *La valigia dei sogni* (1953), Fellini's *Cabiria* (1956), and, already in the 1960s but providing a conclusion to the previous decade, the same director's *8½* (1963). There are others too, which deal with related subjects (Fellini's *The White Sheik* [1951], about the world of photo-romances, is an obvious example); or which clearly refer to the cinema though not so fully as the titles cited. Nevertheless the latter

offer a sort of exemplary journey in the course of which the ideas about cinema current in the fifties can be put on display.

This is, first of all, a journey which goes from a discourse of the reproductive capacity of the cinema (*Bellissima*) to one on its expressive capacity (8½). In the former case what is brought into play is a contrast with the world of everyday life; in the latter the focus is on an individual's wish for self-expression. An idea of cinema as reflection (albeit imperfect) is replaced by one of cinema as language (albeit problematic). This change of attitude has many consequences: for example the 'truth' of the images and sounds ceases to be conceived in terms of the possibility of reproducing the shape of things and events and becomes instead a question of aesthetic intention.

There is also a second movement – a slide from considering the cinema as a social phenomenon, not without its negative attributes but nevertheless rooted in popular life (*Bellissima*), to a vision increasingly centred on the individual experience of someone who would like to be, has been, and to a degree still is, part of his surroundings (8½). In this movement the cinema loses its associations of an everyday and immediately accessible presence and becomes instead an event or a ritual with all the attributes of something exceptional. On the one side an idea of cinema as a shared background, a common point of reference; on the other the idea of cinema as an object of celebration, a place of nostalgia and myth. Again the consequences are many: for example the rapid reversal through which cinema both magnifies its role and loses sense of its own complexity and force.

Behind this reversal of viewpoint, however, one feature remains constant: the suggestion that cinema has to overcome a series of obstacles in order to assert itself; or rather that in order to assert itself it needs to correct some important characteristic of itself. In this sense the idea that occupies the stage is that of a cinema which achieves itself 'in spite of' certain countervailing factors – in spite of the artifice of the fiction, in spite of the banality of much of the content, in spite of the laughter of unappreciative spectators, in spite of the difficulties of organizing the making of a film.

A cinema 'in spite of': this formula can be taken as a reference to another metalinguistic genre, the backstage musical, where the show is put on 'in spite of' all obstacles, just as love triumphs 'in spite of' a series of misunderstandings. But even more it refers back to Freud's *Verleugnung*, the mechanism of misrecognition and denial which underlies all forms of representation, particularly 'realistic' ones. If a scene (in theatre, cinema, or wherever) purporting to represent a real situation comes across as 'credible', this is because it invokes a proposition of the type 'Yes, but . . .' – 'Yes I know (that it isn't real), but all the same (it looks it)' – enabling the spectator both to recognize the impossibility of the scene being

¹ See Octave Mannoni, *Clef pour l'imaginaire, ou l'Autre Scène* (Paris: Seuil, 1969).

played and also to accept it as a legitimate replacement for what it represents. The 'yes, but' allows one to be simultaneously aware of the falsity of the representation and of its role as a stand-in for the represented and, crucially, to pass over the former aspect in the name of the functionality of the latter.¹ Now if such a mechanism is indeed operative, it follows that, while Italian cinema in the fifties progressively loses any sense of reference, or any awareness of a sense of reference, to the background of neorealism (as shown precisely by the shift from the idea of reproduction to that of expressivity, and from the idea of social machine to that of individual performance), it nevertheless continues to work over the very thing which is at the root of the representation of the real and of belief in this representation, that is to say the 'in spite of'. Applying this 'in spite of' to its definition of itself as cinema, it somehow keeps alive the psychological structure that goes with representation, and with realistic representation in particular.

Be that as it may, what matters is that there has been a change in the definition that cinema gives of itself, to which there corresponds a difference in the images offered to the spectator. I now want to look more closely at this series of elements as they appear in two of the films mentioned above: *Bellissima* and *La signora senza camelie*.

Bellissima

Bellissima is centred around a narrative core which seems at the same time simple and exemplary. A production company is looking for a small girl for the leading role in its next film. A woman, Maddalena, tries, at the cost of great sacrifice and against the wishes of her husband, to secure the part for her daughter. But then, having got to know the world of the cinema close at hand, she turns down the offer eventually made to her. So, on the one hand desire and on the other renunciation; on one side the fascination of show business, on the other the known world of family life; on one side the appeal of the cinema, on the other a daily reality which finally imposes its demands.

But though this is the basic schema, the film also hints at a far more subtle articulation of its two conflicting poles. Cinema and reality, although counterposed, do not form two compact, impenetrable blocks. Start with the cinema: in *Bellissima* our idea of the cinema is conveyed above all through Maddalena's own image of it, which she has in her role as a spectator, as a regular cinemagoer, reader of cine-romances and of the lives and loves of the stars. In the first part of the story the cinema for Maddalena is, so to speak, a dimension of reality truer than true life. The cinema is something that puts things to rights, because it enables one to get something one needs, but which life does not directly give. On the one hand,

by showing an 'ideal' world, it frees an imagination otherwise trapped in the everyday; on the other hand, because of the exceptional status it gives to those who take part in it, it allows them an opportunity for self-realization not ordinarily available. In other words cinema allows one to dream, to hope, to experience emotion and happiness, and at the same time to be recognized for what one is and deserves to become. Or, put another way, on the one side it provides the stories without which existence would be flat and unbearable, while on the other it foregrounds the identity of the person who is part of its world, making him or her a centre of attention, somebody known, with a definite place. This is the vision that Maddalena has of the cinema – and which she has, I repeat, in her role as a spectator.

Two scenes in particular bring this vision to the fore: the dialogue with her husband in the open-air cinema where *Red River* is being shown ('It's not just a story, it's not just a story . . .') and the row between the couple in front of the neighbours ('I want my daughter to become somebody . . .'). In each case the cinema for Maddalena is not in contradiction with life: it is what allows an otherwise unexpressed potential to be realized, what sanctions and legitimates an otherwise hidden dimension of existence. So it is not deformation but empowerment, not betrayal but enlargement: in a word there is not a split between cinema and reality, but an interaction.

Of the two things the cinema is seen as offering, the right to stories and the right to an identity, it is the latter which turns out to be crucial. Maddalena acts because she wants her daughter to fulfil herself and assert herself: she wants her to be recognized for what she is, or for what she seems to be in her mother's eyes. But failure is inevitable, and it happens precisely at this level: when the rushes are shown, the laughing and joking of the crew ('it's a dwarf . . .') make Maddalena realize that the cinema can only offer a vision of Maria which will be abnormal and grotesque. She changes her mind on the spot. She realizes that the cinema is something other than she had thought, or rather that other people see it differently and that their perceptions and actions make it different – and less attractive – than the rosy light that had always surrounded it in her eyes. The image of the cinema which she has as a spectator comes into conflict with the image of cinema shared by those who work in it. What arises, aside from the inevitable disappointment, is a real clash of perspectives. The woman's journey to the world of Cinecittà becomes a journey of initiation, opening up the discovery of alternative points of view.

What is cinema for the others? Let us run through the different perspectives they have, beginning with the most marginal. First there is the production company, Stella Film, for which cinema is a field of activity centred on a production. This production activity is based on certain precise 'recipes'. What they want first is a story

with a popular touch (the film to be made appears to be an adaptation of a story in the rose-tinted romance genre). But they also want to generate interest, and therefore an audience, in advance of the film's production: hence the competition for the 'prettiest little girl in Rome' (modelled, obviously, on the beauty competitions fashionable in the 1950s, and an ironic reference to neorealism's discovery of actors 'straight from the street' and to the deformation of that principle).

Then there is the character of the self-styled 'agent' Annovazzi, and along with him all the people working on the fringes of the production, from the photographer on the set to the dancing mistress. For these people the cinema is a world of wheeling and dealing, seizing the main chance, you-scratch-my-back-I'll-scratch-yours, and generally getting on as best you can.

And Blasetti.² For him, by contrast, the cinema is a field in which to display a solid and acknowledged professional skill. This professionalism has two main aspects. On the one hand it is based on a perfect knowledge of how the 'machine' works and an acceptance of its rules: Blasetti goes along with the producer's wishes and the general way he sees the production. On the other hand, however, his professionalism leads him to see things other people cannot see: it is Blasetti who spots Maria's potential above and beyond what the evidence seems to suggest, and who decides in her favour against the opinion of his team, because he understands something they cannot. Professionalism, then, is both doing the job properly and seeing beyond it – the exact opposite of the wheeling and dealing of Annovazzi and his cronies, which is based on a mixture of improper behaviour and shortsightedness. Blasetti, who is the perfect incarnation of professionalism, is at once both craftsman and artist, man of knowledge and midwife.

Finally there is the ageing actress Tilde Spernanzoni. For her the cinema is the creation of a fantasy dimension, the conquest of a different world. Behind her affected gestures and slightly pathetic manner, Tilde Spernanzoni is by no means a marginal caricature (as the dancing mistress and maybe even Annovazzi certainly are); from a structural point of view she is a key character in relation both to Blasetti and to Maddalena. Like Blasetti, Tilde exemplifies a professionalism based on respect for the rules and on her midwifely ability. The rules she follows may be old-fashioned and inadequate, but they are far more honourable than the wheeling and dealing of Annovazzi and company; and she further has the ability to draw hidden talents from people who do not know they have them. Think, for example, of the extraordinary sequence of the acting lesson she gives Maria: the child, apparently reluctant and inept, gradually responds to the game of improvisation, lets fantasy take over, bends down to pick up imaginary strawberries. A simple trick? In reality Tilde (like Blasetti) is a creator, capable of inspiring

2 In *Bellissima* the role of the director of the film within the film is played by Alessandro Blasetti (1900–87), grand old man of the Italian cinema and director of the epic *1860* (1934) as well as of the proto-neorealist *Quattro passi fra le nuvole* (1942). [Tr.]

3 For the idea of the 'communicative pact' (based on a notion also present in Habermas and Greimas), see F. Casetti, 'Patto, patto comunicativo, e patto comunicativo nella neotelevisione', in *Tra me e te* (Rome: Eri, 1988).

creativity in others. Her style is non-naturalistic, but involves starting from real things and 'interpreting' them so as to give an extra dimension to normality. In this sense the old actress incarnates to the full the work of representation: how to construct appearances which say as much as and more than the things they represent; how to pass beyond the fictitious to bring a deeper truth to light.

Tilde's midwifely ability allows her too to make a link between cinema and life: just like Maddalena in fact, though as someone who is part of the scene rather than an observer of it. Tilde, as actress, constructs a 'true' representation for Maddalena who, as spectator, accepts the representation as 'true'. The complementarity of this relationship between the one who 'makes believe' and the one who believes can be seen as forming a 'pact', and more precisely a 'communicative pact'.³ And yet in this making up of the scene there is an irredeemable 'artifice'. Tilde, with her outdated approach and her explicit recourse to a 'method' (*the method?*), demonstrates this better than her counterpart Blasetti, with his colder and more detached manner. While Tilde is giving her lesson outside, in the background rehearsals are being held for a variety act: a show is always a show, there is always something being made up, fabricated. Artifice at this point constitutes an irremovable obstacle, a kind of original sin of the medium: it threatens the pact by turning 'make believe' into manipulation and belief into illusion. Maddalena's crisis, following her encounter with other people's views of the cinema, stems from the discovery that cinema is manipulation and illusion, that it is not to be believed, that the deck is stacked. Artifice, in fact, is what sets off the crisis.

To sum up: Maddalena thinks that cinema does not contradict life, but in some way complements it. She suddenly realizes that for people working in the cinema things don't quite look that way: she acquires a perspective she had not previously had and becomes aware of the artifice of the game. What gives Maddalena her clear sense of this artifice is a double experience. Even at the beginning she is no dupe. On the contrary, her relations with Tilde or with Annovazzi are marked by a certain scepticism from the outset. But the caution with which she approaches her first encounters with other people's vision is never sufficient for her to want to doubt the object of her love, which is cinema. Her first doubts arise only when she meets Iris, the woman who looks after projection of the rushes. Iris too has suffered disappointment, dis-illusion, the premature loss of a dream. She has been an actress, but has had to settle for a more modest ambition, so that cinema for her soon ceased to be a mythic place of self-fulfilment to become just a job. But Iris's experience, unlike that of the other characters, is rooted in the same social milieu as that of Maddalena herself, and she tells her story in a language which Maddalena finds familiar. Maddalena in fact recognizes Iris and is surprised to find her different than she would

have imagined: but what makes the encounter crucial is her recognition that the two women belong to the same world.

The real turning point, however, is what comes next: the showing of the rushes and the crew's reaction. This event strikes at the heart of Maddalena's illusion, showing her that the cinema, far from allowing full recognition of an identity that would otherwise always escape one, in fact reduces people to the role of an object of amusement, a mask.

Maria, then, is reduced to a mask, and not recognized for what she is. This is what forces Maddalena to give up her point of view and accept that of the others, what brings about her disenchantment. I would suggest, tentatively and schematically, that this form of disillusion has more of Pirandello about it than of Brecht. It is true that the moment of disillusion involves an encounter with the cinematic machine in all its immediacy and indeed its brutality (the laughing and joking of the crew), but what really sets it off is on the one hand a play of points of view and on the other a failed recognition. Disenchantment leads Maddalena to an awareness of the status of fiction (and the consequent difficulty of reconciling appearance and reality) rather than to an awareness of the work of mise-en-scene (and the consequent possibility of developing a new line of action). Defeat leads the woman not to a new level of awareness but to the anxiety provoked by seeing the normal transformed into the grotesque – recalling the extraordinary passage in Pirandello's *Diary of Serafino Gubbio*, *Cameraman* where Varia Nestorova recoils in horror from the sight of her own image on the screen.

Mask, fiction: representation shows its true face, the one that detaches it from life. For Maddalena it is now time to wake up, time to say goodbye to the 'pleasure principle' in favour of the 'reality principle'.⁴ But what reality?

Maddalena's everyday world, looked at closely, is pretty strange. She is not the only character in her world to live on illusions. Spartaco, her husband, stares at the plan of their new house in exactly the same way Maddalena looks at American landscapes in movies; it is a place of dreams and a possible new life. It is also a world that is like a stage. The rows between Maddalena and Spartaco are conducted in public, with the neighbours in attendance as a sort of chorus. Family meals are a ritual at which everyone has a role to play. The houses she visits in her work as a nurse are scenes of private dramas and melodramas. And it is a world in which fiction has its acknowledged place. The screen of the open-air cinema in the courtyard of the block of flats opens up just like one of the surrounding windows through which the inhabitants are shouting messages, orders, insults: one more window, or so many more screens. Finally it is a world marked by nonstop acting.

⁴ The opposition in *Bellissima* between these two principles is suggested by Lino Micciché in his book *Visconti e il neorealismo* (Venice: Marsilio, 1990). Micciché's book also gives an account of critical reactions to the film and a detailed philological account of it, beginning with the changes that took place at the script stage.

Interpersonal relations are expressed through shouting, exaggeration, verbal and behavioural exhibitions (quite caricatural in the case of the concierge). As Maddalena remarks, after a row in public: 'if we didn't behave this way, we'd never get to make a screen test'.

This theme of acting is central to a key sequence in the film. Tilde has just given Maria her lesson in acting. Maddalena sits in front of a mirror and asks, 'What is acting, anyway?' The image doubles up on Maddalena's intense facial expression as (significantly) she finishes making herself up. Cut to a reverse field of Maria lit by a single spot which etches her face in sharp relief. A mirror, a light, and the room becomes a stage or a set. What is acting? A synonym for living.

So fiction provides points of articulation for life. It punctuates it (moments of spectacle inside daily life) and transforms it (everyday life itself becoming spectacle). If Maddalena returns to reality this does not mean she gives up on cinema. She gives up what had become an untenable illusion, a split. If Maria had got the part (and indeed she is offered it), this would have been her damnation, not her salvation. But acting as a part of life continues, even if it may modulate into tenderness rather than marital tension (the film ends with Maddalena asking to have her face slapped and Spartaco responding with a kiss and the affectionately spoken words, 'crazy woman'). Maddalena will always be a 'type' ('that crazy woman'), as indeed everyone has to be, a mixture of oneself and one's self-display. In other words, cinema, in spite of everything.

This mixture of life and fiction is something that *Bellissima* hints at from the opening scene onwards. 'Make no sound,' sing the chorus from Donizetti's *Elisir d'amore* on the radio, introducing a story full of shouts and noise. 'Make no sound,' they sing, and are immediately interrupted by the announcement of Stella Film's competition. Aside from the discourse on art (or 'Art?') and its transformation into the content of mass communication and reduction to the level of a support for advertising, the role of this opening is to make clear from the beginning that the story of Maddalena, Maria and Spartaco takes place against the background of a theatrical fiction, and that fiction can act as the measure of life. Precisely, cinema, in spite of everything.

'No more actors, no more story, no more mise-en-scene, that is to say finally within the perfect aesthetic illusion of reality: no more cinema.'⁵ This was Bazin's dream of Italian neorealism. Visconti reminds us that even perfect reality is full of cinema, and can be cinema; and yet that cinema is still always cinema. Cinema, in spite of everything.

5 André Bazin, *Où'est-ce que le cinéma*, vol. IV (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1962), p. 59.

With *La signora senza camelia* Antonioni shifts the problematic set out in *Bellissima*: he brings out an opposition complementary to the one examined above, but also different in various ways.

First, a brief reminder of the plot of the film. Clara Manni, a shopgirl who is trying to become an actress, has a great success with her first film role. She then gets a more important part in a new film, but gives it up after marrying the producer Gianni Franchi, who does not want his wife to act in just any movie. Clara wants to go back on the screen, and Gianni sets up a role for her in a film with artistic pretensions which turns out to be a total flop. There is a crisis in the marriage. Clara is attracted to a diplomat, Nardo, hoping that true love will blossom from their relationship; but Nardo is worried about the consequences for his career, and Clara is left alone. She then studies to become a real actress and asks her husband for a part in an international production he is putting together, but he turns her down. So she accepts a contract to appear in a trashy film and agrees to go out with Nardo, although she knows it will only be a casual affair. The last shot of the film shows her posed for a studio shot at Cinecittà, tears in her eyes.

This is the plot. It seems to be based on a set of contrasts, such as that between the need to adapt to things and the wish for self-realization; or that between having your life decided by others and the will to decide for yourself. These pivot around a fundamental opposition: that between the cinema where Clara started and will always remain, because it's all she's good for (or thought to be good for); and the cinema which she cannot perform in, though first her husband and then she herself try her to place her there.

The cinema where Clara started and will always remain in fact covers a whole galaxy of genres. Her first film, *Addio signora* ('Lady, farewell'), would appear from what we see of it to be a romantic story with songs. The second film, *L'uomo senza destino* ('Man without a destiny') – a title soon changed to *La donna senza destino* ('Woman without a destiny') – is more melodramatic, with a plot that mixes passions and prejudices, impossible loves, and a city/countryside opposition. The film the producer Ercolino unsuccessfully persuades her to star in is in a scandal genre, with references to current events ('prostitutes . . . the Merlin Law').⁶ And lastly, the film which she finally agrees to play in, and which bears the suggestive title of *The Thousand and One Nights*, is a sort of variety show with comedy routines and dancing girls. Clara's cinema, in other words, is a kind of mega-genre, combining melodrama *à la* Raffaello Matarazzo, political comedy *à la* Luigi Zampa, and sketches in the style of Mattoli; or maybe a super-genre, combining passion ('I so love these films of passion'), scandal ('Riot squad to the fore!'), easy morals and provocation

⁶ The *legge Merlin*, or Merlin law, so named after the woman Socialist senator who first introduced it as a parliamentary bill in the early 1950s, was an attempt to limit prostitution involving the closing of licensed brothels. [Tr.]

('censorship'). It nevertheless remains a compact territory, with its higher ground (*Addio signora*) and its pits (*The Thousand and One Nights*).

This mega-genre or super-genre is a bit of a historical mishmash. It combines three areas which in fact the Italian industry of the period kept fairly separate, each with its distinct characteristics and, above all, its own stars. The figure of Clara is therefore something of a hybrid, halfway between Yvonne Sanson and Silvana Pampanini.⁷

Secondly, this mega-genre or super-genre is shown as appealing to different publics. Clara's film are a great popular success and at the same time the object of lively interest on the part of the upper bourgeoisie. The nature of the interest is different, though. On the popular side is an attitude to cinema as an everyday store of dreams, an emotional involvement with stories, and above all a process of identification with the actress – as demonstrated by the sequence outside the Romolo cinema; while on the bourgeois side there is an attitude of curiosity, an interest in the social side, an involvement in the world of film in search of adventures – as shown in the scenes of the day's shooting in the Lotta palace, the afternoon of the premiere at Venice, and the whole story of Clara and Nardo. Clara's films thus produce more or less opposite reactions: responses vary from total involvement to playful caprice. They do not really identify their audience. Instead they serve as examples of the different forms of experience that the society of the period could have of cinema in general. Or, perhaps more accurately, they give a picture of cinema as social phenomenon.

Thirdly this mega-genre or super-genre nevertheless possesses certain features shared by the 'middling' or 'lower-middling' Italian cinema of the early 1950s. These include characteristics of content: all Clara's films are centred around the figure of a woman who is sensual and unhappy, passionate and unfulfilled, available and unrecognized – a 'lost woman' in terms of the stereotypes of the period (and the same stereotype will mirror the destiny of the actress incarnating the roles . . .); and characteristics of production: Clara's films are also Ercolino's films (or those of his equivalent, the unnamed producer of *The Thousand and One Nights*, who is like Ercolino, only worse). At this level, the films represent operations of limited scope ('I just don't have the resources') based on banal formulae ('Sex, politics and religion, all rolled into one') and put together hastily (actresses who have come from nowhere, like Clara herself and her stand-in, the girl who has graduated from the world of *fumetti*⁸); unplanned ('I'll sort this out at the dubbing stage') and mercenary through and through ('I'm doing this film because I need the money'). In short a very limited form of cinema, whose saving grace is the commonsense of its participants (Ercolino never pretends to be other than what he is); a fly-by-night cinema.

7 Yvonne Sanson (b. 1926) and Silvana Pampanini (b. 1927) were popular stars of the Italian cinema of the 1950s. Pampanini, a former singer and beauty queen, was a rather statuesque 'sex goddess', while Sanson, who had a more varied talent as an actress, appeared mainly in melodramas. [Tr.]

8 *Fumetti* is an Italian term for comic books, including those known as *fotoromanzi* (or 'photo-novels') which do not use graphics but posed photos of the action with actors or models. The world of the *fotoromanzi* is satirized in Fellini's *The White Sheik* (1951). [Tr.]

So, if the films that Clara is forced to make cross between and merge different genres, at the risk of historical falsification this is because they are intended to signify cinema as a pure and simple social phenomenon, with stereotypical contents and produced with cottage industry means. Opposing them, as we shall see, are the films which Clara does not get to make, or for which she has no talent when she does get to make them.

Clara's other pole of activity also involves a composite genre. On the one side we have a self-declared art film (*Joan of Arc*), and on the other a prestige (but not necessarily artistic) production in the shape of the film which Gianni Franchi gets underway and which Clara pleads in vain to be given a part in. The former is a one-off, where the operative factor is an authorial will (that of the unnamed director); the latter is an international production, where the operative factor is the financial and managerial skills of the producer.

Once again the films in question belong to genres which Italian cinema of the period kept fairly distinct. *Joan of Arc* recalls some of Rossellini's enterprises – and indeed Rossellini was at the time about to make his own Joan of Arc film with Ingrid Bergman, which might account for the reference to Bergman which follows the mention of Falconetti. The new production, on the other hand, is reminiscent of *Fabiola* or *Ulysses* or *Roman Holiday* and the productions of Hollywood-on-Tiber. It is as if Gianni Franchi had suddenly changed from being Peppino d'Amato (a producer of popular films and also of Rossellini's *Francesco giullare di Dio*) to being Dino De Laurentiis (channel for American capital in Italy): in other words, another hybrid.

But this syncretism too is functional. It serves to mark out a territory whose characteristics are the opposite of the previous one. It designates a cinema which has value in its own right, not just as a social phenomenon; which has a serious, and not just a stereotypical and banal content; and which has a proper industrial structure, not just that of a cottage industry. Everything we learn about this cinema, however indirectly, fits this general character. *Joan of Arc* aims at expressivity, not effect; it is made not to make money, but as a showpiece for its star; it opens in Venice, not at the Romolo; it refers to a tradition, not just to the latest scandals, and so forth. As for the new film, it needs planning and research, not just improvisation; it is aimed at a broad and lasting public, not just to catch the mood of the moment; it tells a proper story, and doesn't just string together a series of situations. On every point, the two types of cinema (and therefore the two directions in which Clara might go) are direct opposites, almost negative and positive of each other.

The point of the characterization, then, is to create two ideal types, two poles of activity, rather than to give an accurate picture

9 There is an element here of unconscious response to her husband's chiding – his 'Do you want to make films or pornography?' and 'Remember you are a lady'.

10 See Elena Dagrada, 'Antonioni e la macchina cinema (*La signora senza camelie* e altro)', in G. Tinazzi (ed.), *Michelangelo Antonioni: identificazione di un autore* (Parma: Pratiche, 1985). Dagrada writes of a 'Camusian gesture'.

of the cinema of the period. This said, it is interesting to note that *La signora senza camelie* seems to suggest a possible transition from one type of cinema to the other. After her affair with Nardo, Clara finds comfort in the advice given her by Lodi, her costar in *Addio signora*: study to become a real actress. As Lodi puts it, up to now all they have done is photograph her beauty; from now on they should be photographing her performance. Clara throws herself one hundred per cent into the enterprise, partly as a compensation for her failed affair, but mainly as an attempt to qualify herself professionally. By studying, she aims to forge herself a new role both as a woman and as an actor: her purpose is to become mistress of her own life and her own craft.⁹ But she cannot make the transition: Nardo wants a return to the old, debasing relationship; her ex-husband refuses her a new role. 'Real' cinema (not to mention real independence) is out of Clara's reach. If her efforts succeed at all it is at another level: she comes to accept her self, even in its negative version. We do not know if her tears at the end are of rage or resignation, fury or self-pity. But that is not the point. The point is that Clara accepts to *expose herself* (to photography, to the cinema), and to do so even with her face deformed by tears; whereas previously this self-exposure even in all her beauty was precisely what gave her such a problem. She says earlier: 'How frightened I am every time I see myself on the screen . . . it's me, it's me'. Again the reference is to Pirandello and to the scene in *Serafino Gubbio, Cameraman* where Varia Nestorova confesses her inability to see herself portrayed: and it is Pirandello Clara is studying in order to become a real actress. Up to then the cinema did not allow Clara to recognize herself: it represented for her a loss of identity. But if the effort of learning fails to give her entry to 'high' cinema, it does at least allow her to reacquire an identity and to display it without losing herself.¹⁰

It is also interesting that, although *La signora senza camelie* sets out to portray high cinema and low or lower-middling cinema with equal sharpness, it does not actually treat them with equal care. High cinema – the area where Clara fails – is identified clearly enough, but is described in a patchy and parodic way: we see nothing at all of the film Gianni is producing at the end, and what we see of *Joan of Arc* (at the Venice premiere) is so extreme as to be paradoxical. The low or lower-middling cinema, on the other hand – the area in which Clara works – is shown in some detail: we see the final sequence of *Addio signora* being screened at the Fiamma cinema; we spend some time on the set of *La donna senza destino*, and see the sequence of the kiss as it is shot; and we meet the cast of *The Thousand and One Nights*, posing with Clara for a production still. This inequality of treatment is so emphatic that we must regard it as symptomatic. It is around this point that the last part of my analysis will be woven.

La signora senza camelie,
Clara Manni (Lucia Bosé)
on the set of *The Thousand
and One Nights*,
(courtesy of the BFI stills
archive and ENIC)



11 There critical reactions are
analyzed in *ibid.*

12 There is at least one precedent
for this in Italian cinema,
Augusto Genina's *Prix de beauté*
(1930)

The fact is that *La signora senza camelie* does not only present the low and lower-middling cinema in greater detail (it is after all the cinema in which Clara works, and therefore has more presence in the plot); it also works explicitly on its materials. Much of the criticism of the film has focused on its apparent concessions to a melodramatic mode – that is to say, to one of the components of the very type of cinema that the film is 'about'.¹¹ As I shall argue, the idea of concessions is utterly mistaken, but it is certainly true that the articulation of the story has a very melodramatic flavour. Even the title, derived from that of the play by Dumas fils, *La Dame aux camélias*, which was the source of Verdi's *Traviata*, already contains a reference to the classic *topoi* of the image of the nineteenth-century romantic heroine. The story has been updated: Marguerite Gautier has become an actress, and does not lose herself for love but because of an inability to love.¹²

There are many other echoes of the melodrama: for example Gianni's suicide attempt, where the emotional tone is suffused with extremist and irrational gestures; or the behaviour of the *haute bourgeoisie* at the Lotta palace and again at Venice, which gives full rein to a stereotyped portrayal of empty-headed, affected, rich people whose life is one long holiday; or Nardo, the perfect incarnation of the egotistical young lover, blasé and self-satisfied; or Clara's mother, a kind of chorus, with her oohs and ahs and 'tell me more' and 'cheer up' and general repertory of expressions which are all pure affectation.

This recourse to melodrama takes place even when the film seems to criticize the premisses of the genre. Two scenes in particular

display this well: the tears of the stand-in on the set of *La donna senza destino*, and the confession of failure as a woman and as an actress uttered by one of the extras at Cinecittà near the end of the film. Each of these scenes offers a very precise description of the mechanism of illusion and dis-illusion operated by low cinema (similar to that offered by *Bellissima* for cinema in general); and the tone is evidently critical in each case. But in themselves these moments also represent triumphs of the pathetic, which is the very basis of melodrama. The situations being staged are the tale of Lost Hope and the spectacle of Inevitable Unhappiness, classic *topoi* of the genre. Even more clearly than those given earlier, these two examples show the film drifting into an area from which it also claims to take a distance – one inhabited not only by low cinema but by serial novels, romances and *fumetti*. On a literal reading, the film is quite similar to the sort of product which constitutes Clara's field of activity, and her damnation.

But this is true only on a literal reading, one which takes no account of the work performed by Antonioni on his raw materials. These are precisely that: materials to be used. The melodramatic elements in the film are drawn from elsewhere, singled out, and foregrounded. They are put in quotation marks, marked as someone else's discourse and distanced at the very moment they are appropriated. This act of quotation, at the same time a transplant and a transformation, a taking in and a holding at arm's length, is the key to the approach taken by Antonioni towards his material. It brings to the fore the metalinguistic dimension of the film. *La signora senza camelie* is a second-degree film not only because it contains film within film but also because of the way it subjects its material to an explicitly cinematic (or rather, as we shall see, anticinematic) treatment. In *La signora senza camelie* cinema is both the theme that is narrated and the filter of the narration: the film tells us a story about the cinema, while also making clear that it is a story told in and by a film.

The use of quotation is activated in two ways. The first is a form of *emphasis* applied to the representation. The portrayal of events is endowed with a surplus, which acts to underline both form and content. In such cases the reference to cinema is inserted into the scene represented so as to make it take on a clearly marked and meaning-laden dimension, to make it reveal its nature as fiction. Some examples: the behaviour of the bourgeoisie in the Lotta palace, which is the acting out of a social performance no different from the professional performance put on by the actors and extras on the set; or Gianni and Clara's house, with its mirrors, its impeccable decor, its vistas, to all intents and purposes indistinguishable from a set; or Clara's three kisses – with Lodi, with Gianni, and with Nardo – three very different kisses, but also related.¹³

¹³ Dagrada, 'Antonioni e la macchina cinema'.

14 The scene may be part of a rehearsal rather than an actual take: there has been no shout of 'camera!'

Clara's first kiss is part of the shooting of *La donna senza destino*: it takes place in front of the camera, and we see it as the audience will see it.¹⁴ In this sense it is already cinema, in all its immediacy. But the kiss is also accompanied by two offscreen voices, that of the director giving instructions to the actors, and Gianni's complaining that the scene is too daring. These offscreen voices introduce the cinematic apparatus in both of its principal aspects – that of production (the director giving instructions) and that of consumption (the onlooker commenting on the spectacle). The kiss, therefore, is not just there to be filmed, it also functions to reveal the 'cinematic scene' *par excellence* (almost a primal scene, with its *mise-en-scène* of the unconscious and the look of the voyeur). The other two kisses are private, one with the husband and one with the lover, but they are related to and refer to the first one. Clara's kiss with Gianni is set in front of a back-projection screen against which can be seen the silhouettes of lights and an electrician moving them around, with an offscreen voice shouting 'Further to the right the two thousand . . . lower . . . great! Now a gauze'. Her kiss with Nardo takes place on an unused stage, piled high with set materials in wood and plaster, frames and painted flats, and in the background a functioning stage from which voices can be heard getting ready for a scene and the words 'ready, action!'. In each case, a kiss made to order, an actor's performance, all the trappings of cinema short of actual filming of the scene. In all these cases the reference to cinema acts to produce what I would call a *hypersemanticization* of the material.

The other procedure is one of *undertone*, aiming to take something out of the representation, rather than add to it. What is involved here is not a reference to cinema but the intervention of a cinematic style which is somehow lacking and produces errors of grammar and of what are conventionally regarded as the rules of good cinema. Two sequences in particular show this procedure in action: the conversation between Clara and Renata, and the meeting between Gianni and Clara and her parents. In both these scenes the characters never face each other or look each other in the eye; their actions do not seem to relate to each other's. The narration undergoes a process of dispersal: it is not just that the characters are shown as ill at ease with each other, but the film seems ill at ease with itself, unable to find a way of articulating itself clearly. I shall call this opposite procedure *desemanticization*.

Emphasis and undertone, hypersemanticization and desemanticization, these procedures each work to transform the raw materials, to engage them in a play of writing which both affirms and denies them. For this reason it is wrong to talk of concessions to melodrama. The themes may be drawn from that source, but the way they are treated contradicts them utterly. And for this reason I

return to the idea of a cinema which affirms itself *in spite of* matter that is recalcitrant to it. The difference is that in the case of *Bellissima* the 'in spite of' relates to the life that had to be returned to because of the untenable character of fiction; whereas in *La signora senza camelie* the 'in spite of' relates to the materials which had to be used because they were those given by the situation. In the two films the structure of the argument is much the same. There is an ideal being aimed at (on the one side cinema as life writ large, and on the other cinema as a place free of the indignity of the everyday); there is then a step backwards that has to be taken (on the one side a return to the everyday, on the other a return to the cinema of compromise and small-scale trafficking); and finally there is a positive affirmation that emerges even in the apparent adversity of circumstances (on the one side the return of cinema in the form of the performative, spectacular aspects of life itself, on the other 'high' cinema returning in the form of the ability of filmic writing to transform even the most melodramatic of situations).

But the terms in play within this shared structure are different. In *Bellissima* the ideal is cinema as a whole, and the way it is lived by its audience (cinema as social phenomenon, in fact). In *La signora senza camelie* the ideal is a part of cinema only, the part which allows for self-expression or achieved professionalism. In the former the step backwards is caused by cinema's character as fiction as revealed in the behaviour of its participants; whereas in the latter the cause is an ill fate which prevents someone from achieving something that she is ready to attempt. Finally, in *Bellissima* cinema is liberated from its original sin and reappears in apparently alien territory, in the world of everyday life. In *La signora senza camelie*, however, cinema patches up its own internal high/low dichotomy by the application of high style to banal content. So in the one case cinema reappears 'in spite of' the counterclaims of life, while in the other it reasserts itself 'in spite of' the concessions that have to be made within it to banality and stereotyping. In the one case cinema reappears because life itself is inherently 'cinematic'; in the other it reasserts the cinematic potential of some of its material.

The net result of this differentiation of terms within a similar structure can be described in this way. In *Bellissima* cinema is taken as a single object (though viewable from different angles, by spectators and by producers) and this object is rescued by something that appears extraneous to it, but in fact is not, which is life (so that instead of cinema being dissolved into life, as in the official doctrine of neorealism, it is now life that requires cinema). In *La signora senza camelie* the cinema opens up an internal dialectic between its components and finds its salvation in a division of roles which assigns to filmic writing the task of dignifying and ennobling otherwise unworthy and untenable contents.

It is easy to see from this how cinema's turning in on itself and

the increasing role given to stylistic and expressive elements are further developed throughout the 1950s by the other films mentioned earlier. But that has not been my main purpose. What I have tried to do has been to open up a territory to a new form of exploration. To understand what a cinema thinks of itself, what it says about itself, how its problems are articulated.

This article, which is part of a work in progress on the image of the cinema in Italian society in the 1950s, first appeared (in a slightly shorter version) in *La scena e lo schermo*, nos 3–4 (1990). I should like to thank the journal's editor, Lino Micciché, for permission to reprint it here.

Translated by Geoffrey Nowell-Smith

Cary Grant in the fifties: indiscretions of the bachelor's masquerade

STEVEN COHAN

While the male stars who most dominate our cultural memories of the 1950s are the sexual rebels – Brando, Dean, Presley – one of the most popular leading men at the time was Cary Grant, a Hollywood star since the thirties who returned to box-office prominence at the end of the decade with the great successes of *An Affair to Remember* (1957), *Indiscreet* (1958), *North by Northwest* (1959) and *Operation Petticoat* (1959). Grant's renewed popularity in the late fifties is notable for two reasons. The first major star to achieve independence from the studios in the forties, Grant financially owned and thus controlled much of his screen output during the fifties. He was consequently able to preserve the star image from his prewar films in a way that other actors of his generation did not. As Peter Biskind has pointed out, during the 1950s Cooper, Cagney, Wayne, Bogart, Stewart all played psychotic or neurotic variations of their older screen images.¹ Cary Grant, on the other hand, not only seemed to hold the clock still, but his star persona acquired even more glamour and appeal during this decade as 'an authentic American hero' (in William Rothman's phrase²), or 'a national monument' (in Stanley Cavell's³). Thus in 1958, when *Photoplay* included Grant, dubbed 'Hollywood's epitome of romance', in a pictorial spread featuring a number of male stars in swimming pools, it did not at all seem surprising – or inappropriate – to find the fifty-four-year old actor placed alongside such younger heartthrobs as

1 Peter Biskind, *Seeing is Believing: How Hollywood Taught Us to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties* (New York: Pantheon, 1983), p. 252.

2 William Rothman, 'North by Northwest: Hitchcock's monuments to the Hitchcock film', in *The "I" Of The Camera: Essays In Film Criticism, History, and Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 177.

3 Stanley Cavell, 'North by Northwest', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 7, no. 4 (1981), p. 769.

Cary Grant in 1958:
'Hollywood's epitome of
romance' (courtesy of *Film*
Monthly, formerly *Photoplay*)



4. '6 ways to rope in that summer romance', *Photoplay*, September 1958, p. 95. Cary Grant's advice, by the way, was 'Don't show jealousy, but diplomacy'

5. Charles Higham and Roy Moseley, *Cary Grant: The Lonely Heart* (New York: Avon, 1990), p. 248

6. 'They were easy to drip dry when one was traveling'. Grant reportedly told reporter Joe Hyams in explanation: see Higham and Moseley, *Cary Grant*, p. 281

Tony Curtis, Rock Hudson, George Nader, Hugh O'Brian and Mark Damon.⁴

Despite his legendary career as a leading man in the fifties, though, Cary Grant was surely something of a paradoxical romantic hero for the period. Grant's biographers Charles Higham and Roy Moseley explicitly call his fifties screen image a 'mask', by which they mean, with reference to his 'sexual problems', 'his false image, so carefully sustained, of unequivocal masculinity and strong emotional security'.⁵ While successfully personifying a screen image of eternal youthfulness, Americanness, heterosexual attractiveness, and sartorial elegance, Grant was actually middle-aged, British, bisexual, and a secret crossdresser (apparently wearing women's nylon panties underneath his expensively tailored grey flannel suits⁶). 'Cary Grant' was nonetheless so paradigmatic of romantic masculinity in the late fifties that Billy Wilder could simply have Tony Curtis imitate the star's well-known speaking style and audiences at *Some Like It Hot* (1959) immediately recognized this joke as a reference to Hollywood's exemplary leading man. 'Where did you get that phoney accent?' Jack Lemmon asks Curtis after watching the latter pose as a bachelor oil heir to catch Marilyn Monroe's attention: 'Nobody talks like that'. Of course, everyone watching Wilder's film knew who *did* speak that way – though

audiences at the time were divided as to whether the point of the joke was tribute, satire, or just plain gossip.

More than a simple reference to a famous cultural icon of romantic seduction, this allusion to Grant in *Some Like It Hot* represents his celebrated persona as a *fabrication*, a construction of masculinity out of voice, clothes, bearing – all, as the Wilder film plays it out, taken from someone else to cover up a fundamental failure of male sexuality. ‘I’m harmless’, Tony Curtis confesses to Marilyn Monroe in Cary Grant’s voice: and while the male’s disguise in this scene is nothing but a decoy for his own heterosexual aggression (the pretence of impotence lures Monroe into making all the moves in Curtis’s seduction of her), Wilder’s reference to Grant recognizes something of a disturbing underside to the star’s male screen image. Most obviously, it implies that this famous screen persona of charm and elegance is actually covering up the great fear which preoccupied fifties American culture when it came to thinking about masculinity: impotence, which the culture equated with emasculation, particularly in light of the two Kinsey reports in 1948 (on men) and 1953 (on women), and their widely circulated claim that female sexuality peaked late in life while male sexual performance petered out much earlier in the game.⁷

The reference to ‘Cary Grant’ in *Some Like It Hot* goes even further than that, however. For far from simply making a joke about the apparent sexual durability of a legendary Hollywood leading man (and at his own expense, too) it also means to ask what lies behind the star’s deceptively transparent but also enduring romantic style, suggesting that his consummate masculinity is a masquerade. Grant’s successful manipulation of signs (voice, bearing, looks), Tony Curtis parodically shows – when he plays a man who disguises himself as a woman and then, while still pretending to be her, also passes himself off as a generic version of ‘Cary Grant’ – continues to produce this quintessential leading man for the benefit of American movies. What lies underneath that masquerade of romantic masculinity, the Wilder film suggests – if only indirectly as the effect of this joke – is a potential subversion of the stable, binarized gender terms by which American culture in the fifties represented masculinity as an automatic, unchanging, and natural relation between male sexuality and male identity. This consummate American lover, the film teases, may therefore be harmless but he is irresistible all the same – and possibly for that very reason.

To be sure, with its naughty implication of castration, the value placed on the star image of ‘Cary Grant’ by *Some Like It Hot* in 1959 appears to reverse the more attractive and progressive screen persona Andrew Britton sees in Grant’s thirties films, particularly the screwball comedies which crystallized his star image. Those comedies, Britton argues, singling out *The Awful Truth* (1937),

7 That the problem of impotence was crucial to an understanding of the social and sexual pressures faced by American men was a theme stressed in popular accounts of American manliness, as in some of the magazine articles cited below; and it also appeared in academic discussions, as in sociologist Helen Mayer Hacker’s discussion of impotence in ‘The new burdens of masculinity’, *Marriage and Family Living*, vol. 19, no. 3 (1957), pp. 228–9.

8 Andrew Britton, 'Cary Grant: comedy and male desire', *Cine-Action!*, no. 7 (1986), pp. 37, 38, 43.

Bringing Up Baby (1938) and *Holiday* (1938), are remarkable for 'the extent to which characteristics assigned by those [traditional gender] roles to women can be presented as being desirable and attractive in a man'. The comic plots of 'male chastisement' in those films established Grant's star image around a bisexual premise of 'male femininity' which leads a Grant character to renounce the phallus and find 'an experience of release and pleasure' in his symbolic castration. In this way, Britton concludes, the screwball comedies 'use Grant to formulate a type of masculinity which is valuable and attractive by virtue of the sharing of gender characteristics with women.'⁸

Two decades later, in the frequent reminders in his fifties films of the longevity of his career and the celebrated familiarity of his face, Grant's mature screen persona still evoked those screwball comedies and their revisionist organization of male and female sexual identities. This is one reason why Billy Wilder's citation of Grant's star image in *Some Like It Hot* did not appear at all farfetched or forced at the time of its release but perfectly in tune with the crossdressing premise of that farce. Even more telling, that film's representation of the star through the related tropes of disguise, bachelorhood, and emasculation begins to suggest something of the popular actor's historical significance as a movie star for postwar US audiences.

To start with, in one way or another many of Grant's films during this period lead the character he plays to undertake some form of disguise, however flimsy the pretence, innocent the motivation, and transparent the mask. Grant masquerades in some of his earlier films, to be sure: in *Bringing Up Baby*, for example, he has to hide his identity from Katharine Hepburn's aunt; and in *Mr Lucky* (1943) his character first adopts the name of a dead Greek crony in order to avoid the draft and then he goes on to double his masquerade by trying to con a socialite (Laraine Day). But such disguises become even more of a routine feature in his postwar films. For a variety of reasons, most of them rather farfetched in order to emphasize the selfconsciousness of his role-playing, Grant poses as a teenager in *The Bachelor and the Bobby Soxer* (1947); as a bride in *I was a Male War Bride* (1949); as an adolescent and child in *Monkey Business* (1952); as a businessman from Oregon in *To Catch a Thief* (1955); as a married man in *Indiscreet* (1958); as a spy in *North by Northwest*: and these various impersonations culminate in the multiple masks his character wears before Audrey Hepburn in *Charade*, his last straight romantic leading role in 1963. Although the narrative explanations offered for his disguises differ in motivation and tone from film to film, depending on the genre (farce, romantic comedy, thriller), these roles keep grounding the sexual appeal of Grant's masculinity in a masquerade of one sort or another. The significance of masquerade in Grant's postwar films

has a great deal to do with the growing disparity between his age and the romantic roles he continued to play: however, rather than achieving, as *Some Like it Hot* implies, the concealment of male lack – the diminishment in sexual capacity that, Kinsey showed, accompanies a man's maturity – the masquerading in these films encourages impersonation and play, in this way renewing the mobile screen persona of the earlier screwball comedies.

I am well aware that, following Joan Riviere's by now famous case study, the term 'masquerade' has had a specific psychoanalytic purchase for an understanding of *femininity* as an adventure in selfconscious self-representation, with the feminine mask used, according to Riviere's account, to cover up the female's theft of the phallus.⁹ This context has dominated the question of masquerade in film studies, not least because of several important articles published by *Screen* which applied Riviere's comments to film in order to theorize female spectatorship and subjectivity.¹⁰ In my own use of the term here, though, I am more interested in picking up the performative rather than the phallocentric implications of the masquerade, using it in accordance with Judith Butler's discussion of gender as 'performative – that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be', an effect achieved by treating expressions of gender as if they were their causes as well as their results.¹¹ A masquerade of this sort does not conceal a deep, dark secret so much as define an identity in terms of opposing planes in order to establish the impression of dimensionality: an outside in relation to an inside, surface to depth, performance to authenticity. What the mask – one specific cultural form of which is the Hollywood star whose screen personality is, not accidentally, termed a *persona* – signifies is the mark or playing out of those differences.

That Grant's star image became inseparable from the values of gender mobility and sexual play celebrated by the screwball comedies may help to explain why his screen persona could successfully move back and forth between apparently rigid binaries (not only feminine/masculine, as Britton shows, but also British/American, youthful/ageing, genteel/common) in a way uncharacteristic of other major stars of the studio era. As Bruce Babington and Peter William Evans note,

Where among Screwball stars William Powell, say, was one-dimensionally debonair, Ray Milland bland, Don Ameche plebeian and suspiciously Latin, Henry Fonda the soul of uprightness, and Gary Cooper a prodigy of plainspeaking (though in some of these cases they played against type), Grant is marvellously protean, the multifarious embodiment of all these qualities and more.¹²

The protean quality of his screen persona, however, did more than create an effect of multidimensionality, integrating those various

9 Joan Riviere, 'Womanliness as a masquerade', reprinted in Victor Burgin, James Donald, and Cora Kaplan (eds), *Formations of Fantasy* (New York: Methuen, 1986), pp. 35–44.

10 See Mary Ann Doane, 'Film and the masquerade: theorizing the female spectator', *Screen*, vol. 23, nos 3–4 (1982), pp. 74–88; and John Fletcher, 'Versions of masquerade', *Screen*, vol. 29, no. 3 (1988), pp. 43–69. For a more recent critique of both Riviere's formulation and its application by psychoanalytic film theorists, see Chris Holmlund, 'Masculinity as multiple masquerade: the "mature" Stallone and the Stallone clone', in Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark (eds), *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema* (London: Routledge, forthcoming 1992).

11 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 25.

12 Bruce Babington and Peter William Evans, *Affairs to Remember: The Hollywood Comedy of the Sexes* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), p. 22.

qualities under a single name. Rather, the fluidity with which Grant moved between binarized terms like masculine/feminine, British/American, genteel/common, allowed him to personify them as a contradiction: on the one hand representing gentility and bearing without, as did many comic actors of lesser rank, appearing effete; and on the other hand, trading upon his undeniable good looks as a screen lover without, as did many other foreign leading men, sacrificing his ability to connote the combination of virility and middle-class Americanness that ranked him alongside stars like Wayne, Stewart, Cooper, and Bogart. As a consequence, the performance style that produced 'Cary Grant' could be at once civilized and anarchic, subtle and broad, verbal and physical, elitist and popular, suggesting how his signature characteristics as a Hollywood star always implicitly ran the risk of putting him across that line which, for the American popular imagination of the 1950s in particular, polarized virility against effeminacy in an effort to authenticate a standardized version of masculinity.

In most of his postwar films, furthermore, the middle-aged Grant plays a bachelor playboy. The casting of Grant in this type of part is not all that remarkable, of course, since the genre of romantic comedy served as his most comfortable and reliable vehicle: so with a few exceptions (*Mr Blandings Builds His Dream House* [1948], *Monkey Business*, *Room for One More* [1952]), the characters he played were generally single and sought after. To fifties audiences, the bachelor playboy – that 'big dame hunter', as Robert Q. Lewis calls Cary Grant/Nicky Ferrante in *An Affair to Remember* – was more than just a romantic male role in movie comedies; he was also a highly potent cultural figure, the glamorized 'bum' who encoded some of the most deeply felt and conflicting anxieties about male sexual identity. The cultural resonance of the bachelor, particularly when linked to masquerade in the movies, provided the crucial context for reading 'Cary Grant' as the exemplary romantic star during this period.

In its various representations of the domestic and feminized space of the postwar suburban home, fifties USA repeatedly enacted what it read as a symbolic castration of the white middle-class American male; yet the culture also equated *any* form of deviation from that norm with emasculation. 'In the 1950s . . .', Barbara Ehrenreich reports

there was a firm expectation (or as we would now say, 'role') that required men to grow up, marry and support their wives. To do anything else was less than grown up, and the man who wilfully deviated was judged to be somehow 'less than a man'. This expectation was supported by an enormous weight of expert opinion, moral sentiment and public bias, both within popular culture and the elite centers of academic wisdom.

13 Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (New York: Anchor Press, 1983), pp. 11–12, 30.

14 J. Robert Moskin, 'The American male: why do women dominate him?' *Look*, 4 February 1958, pp. 80, 77.

15 William Attwood, 'The American male: why does he work so hard?' *Look*, 4 March 1958, p. 73.

16 Louis Lyndon, 'Uncertain hero: the paradox of the American male', *Woman's Home Companion*, November 1956, p. 107.

At the same time, Ehrenreich continues, 'in the fifties "conformity" became the code word for male discontent'.¹³

With the Man in Grey Flannel paradoxically epitomizing the white middle-class male's success and his *malaise* (heart disease, stress, alcoholism, impotence, boredom), the burning question in the pages of both the popular press and the academic journals was, as one feature article in *Look* magazine put it: 'How did the American male get into this pit of subjection, where even his masculinity is in doubt?' This was not an idle rhetorical question by any means, for as the article took pains to explain:

Scientists who study human behavior fear that the American male is now dominated by the American female. These scientists worry that in the years since the end of World War II, he has changed radically and dangerously; that he is no longer the masculine, strong-minded man who pioneered the continent and built America's greatness. . . . And the experts pin most of the blame for his new plight squarely on women. . . .¹⁴

To be sure, it was widely agreed in the culture that 'Today's breadwinner must be a part-time nursemaid, kitchen helper, handyman and mechanic',¹⁵ but these multiple requirements seemed to tax American men beyond their limits. In an effort to rescue them from the barbecue pits of suburban subjection, the *Woman's Home Companion* admonished its readers:

But remember that a man in a gray flannel suit is also a man and that for two or three years he was away from you in one or another war. For two or three years he lived as undomesticated men do live: without the bills and taxes perhaps, living among other men and not inhibiting man's natural impulse to obscene language and obscene storytelling, seeing men die and perhaps expecting to die himself, free in the sense that he often had no idea what the next day would bring. And free, if he wished, to lie on his bunk evenings, to think and dream.

There are certain deep and perfectly normal masculine drives that were 'permitted' during a war as they are not permitted in a suburban back yard. They are an inborn attraction to violence and obscenity and polygamy, an inborn love of change, an inborn need to be different from the others and rebel against them, a strong need for the occasional company of men only and an occasional need for solitude and privacy.

Certainly all men do not feel these drives to the same degree. And certainly these drives shouldn't all be permitted in that clean, green, happy back yard. But if they are always and completely inhibited – the man in the gray flannel suit will stop being a man.¹⁶

I have quoted these remarks in full because they indicate the extent

to which the fifties idealization of the domesticated married male was in large measure a consequence of demobilization, with social authority being transferred from the American male's platoon commander to his wife. Since the social regulation delegated to women amounted to a symbolic castration, a diminution of the mythic American male spirit as personified by the folk heroes of the nineteenth century, the culture's understanding of masculinity was always in conflict, torn between an abiding concern with upholding the middle-class breadwinning ethic as the true index of manliness, and a deepseated worry that the domestic and corporate spaces in which the male exercised his power sapped him of his natural virility and national character.

The bachelor playboy, hailed by Hugh Hefner as the rebel refusing to serve the dictates of women by succumbing to the institution of marriage, was the admired antithesis of the domesticated suburban husband who wore a grey flannel suit and repressed his irresistible urge to scratch a seven-year itch. According to Ehrenreich, the success of *Playboy* magazine in the early fifties owed much to the way it packaged 'male rebellion' as an alternative representation of masculinity that could compete with the stifling ethic of the male breadwinner. From this perspective, the infamous centrefold nude in every issue was crucial because it confirmed the heterosexuality of the *Playboy* reader, guarding against any suspicions about why he preferred to remain single.¹⁷ More than its centrefolds, though, the real genius of Hefner's magazine showed through in its addressing the bachelor playboy as a consumer, locating his heterosexual desires in his bachelor pad, that fantasy playpen of seduction and technology most famously exemplified by Rock Hudson's apartment in *Pillow Talk* (1959). Here he could safely fulfil those 'perfectly normal masculine drives that were "permitted" during a war as they are not permitted in a suburban back yard'. In serving this function, the primary economic and cultural importance of *Playboy* magazine was therefore its address to a male consumer as part of the postwar effort to enlarge the leisure-time market by overtly including men, who were pitched the desirability of the latest high-fidelity stereo equipment, stylish clothing, appealing aftershaves, virile liquors, exotic vacations, controversial books, hip music, all with the aim of intensifying *their* sexual attractiveness to women as single men.¹⁸

As far as the dominant cultural reading of the bachelor playboy was concerned, then, he cut quite an ambiguous figure. His single status and independence from marital obligations and domestic spaces represented a fundamental 'immaturity', 'irresponsibility', 'insecurity', and 'latent homosexuality' that simultaneously needed correction (to promote a man's maturity) *and* expression (to preserve his heterosexual masculinity). Consequently, when American romantic sex comedies of this period draw on the cultural

¹⁷ Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men*, pp. 42–51.

¹⁸ For an account of the magazine's development in this direction as it was occurring, see Martin Ryan, 'Portrait of Playboy', *Studies in Public Communication*, no. 1 (1957), pp. 11–21.

19 For a discussion of the sexual warfare characteristic of fifties American comedy, see Frank Krutnik, 'The faint aroma of performing seals: the "nervous" romance and the comedy of the sexes', *Velvet Light Trap*, no. 26 (1990), pp. 59–62.

currency of the bachelor playboy, particularly his conventional strategy of seducing women with the pose of being unmasculine or powerless in her hands, what they put at issue in this peculiarly American battle of the sexes is not male sexual desire so much as male sexual identity. Fifties American culture generally made gender and sexuality comparable, focusing on sexual identity as its primary means of remaining silent on questions of sexual desire and orientation. For this reason gender issues in movies of this period – most apparently in the transformation of Tennessee Williams's plays onto the screen, but also in the sex comedies that waged a war of genders around the site of the virginal female body – always appear to encode problems of sexuality too, particularly when dealing with men, their social identities, and their desires.

Film after film in the sex comedy genre begins by valorizing the bachelor playboy for his 'natural' – which is actually to say 'undomesticated' – virility, only to critique him for his immaturity in resisting marriage out of fear of losing his manliness.¹⁹ Tuned to perfection in the Rock Hudson–Doris Day pairings in *Pillow Talk* and *Lover Come Back* (1961), this genre typically leads the bachelor playboy to appreciate the 'tender trap' of institutionalized heterosexual union; and then, in his climactic disavowal of 'sexual freedom', to internalize what was considered the woman's driving desire: monogamous companionship and security. 'Don't worry', Grant's Philip Adams tells Ingrid Bergman's Anna Kalman at the end of *Indiscreet*, 'you'll like being married, you will, you'll see'.

At the same time, the playboy bachelor of fifties sex comedies always has the potential to subvert the culture's rather orthodox understanding of a masculine identity as something natural, spontaneous, and unchanging. Films of this genre typically take the bachelor playboy's sexual virility for granted as the motivating drive behind the formation of the heterosexual couple. However, when, as their comic premise, the films also make the male star conceal his identity as part of his campaign to seduce the female star, they end up by calling his virility into question, because the disguise implicates his heterosexuality as well as his masculinity in his masquerade. To trick the female star he feigns some form of male lack (effeminacy or impotence, both of which encode suggestions of homosexuality), turning his virility inside out to impersonate a feminized masculinity. This disguise then circumstantially leads a medical authority (a doctor, a psychiatrist) to draw the same erroneous conclusion. So, for example, in *Pillow Talk* a doctor thinks Rock Hudson may be pregnant, and in *That Touch of Mink* (1962), a psychiatrist assumes that Cary Grant is Gig Young's lover.

As Babington and Evans remark, in the light of later knowledge about Hudson's sexuality, 'there is a particular irony about a great heterosexual icon of the cinema whose fabrication includes even the nature of his sexuality', even though it may not have been

intentional.²⁰ Consequently, as in the comparable case of Grant, though the implications of the male star's various layers of masquerade were surely not lost on the people making the films – and may well be apparent to contemporary audiences – they did not necessarily contribute to the reception of these films at the time of their release. On the contrary, the narrative closure always safeguards the male star from any implication of sexual transgression; and so does the pairing of the star with a more effeminate and neurotic buddy (Tony Randall, Gig Young) who is sometimes a rival, sometimes a confidante, and whose function regardless is to authenticate the virility and normality of the lead. But even so, that the questioning of a male star's sexual identity became fundamental to the sex comedy genre as its central comic situation shows how much the bachelor's masquerade can unsettle the conventional sexual binaries which the genre's closure tries to uphold through the romantic couple. For the very premise of the bachelor's masquerade is grounded in audience recognition that any form of sexual identity amounts to a masquerade, a construction involving performance, theatricality, and disguise – of the very sort epitomized by the Hollywood star system itself.

Although the Hudson–Day comedies may push the bachelor's masquerade much more obviously towards this pattern of first interrogating and then recuperating a phallocentric virility, Grant's postwar films, with their particular glossing of his bachelorhood through a masquerade, generally have a similar effect. His most popular roles of this era equated the attractiveness of his brand of male sexual identity with the performance of a masquerade of some sort, giving that original screen persona of the screwball comedies a different inflection, one more specifically responsive to the crisis of masculinity dominating the fifties representation of gender in US popular culture. Thus, even when the character he plays may appear to capitulate to the traditional organization of sexual difference around simplistic gendered binaries, in order to be made legible as a star image 'Cary Grant' turns out to dominate the film text with a more unconventional representation of male sexual identity as a masquerade. This point seems to me to be the important conclusion to be drawn from his postwar success as a screen lover, and an analysis of his comedy *Indiscreet*, whose plot pivots around a masquerading bachelor, will bear this out.

Indiscreet (Stanley Donen, Warner Bros, USA, 1958) reunited Grant with Ingrid Bergman after her decade-long exile from Hollywood, and it plays out much of what I have been arguing about the bachelor's masquerade in fifties American sex comedies – but in ways that are obviously tailored to the star's screen image as 'Hollywood's epitome of romance'. Produced by his own company, Grandson Productions, *Indiscreet* well illustrates how Grant's

postwar films generally try to ignore the transgressive resonance of his screen persona while at the same time making full use of it to exploit the range of meanings he inevitably brought to a film as its star.

Unlike the many versions of this genre which followed in the wake of Doris Day's successful vehicles (*Teacher's Pet* with Gable [1958], *Pillow Talk* with Hudson, and *That Touch of Mink* with Grant himself in an uncomfortable performance), *Indiscreet* is an unusual American sex comedy insofar as it imagines a mature couple who are obviously sharing a bed outside of marriage and, more importantly, who can make interesting and intelligent conversations when not in bed. 'This one talks and everything', Anna's sister Margaret (Phyllis Calvert) notes after they first meet Philip Adams; then she wonders what's wrong with him: 'there must be a catch somewhere', she muses, 'he couldn't have escaped this long'. It turns out, he confesses later that evening, that he is married, though he cannot get a divorce; and under those conditions Anna takes the initiative in starting an affair – the implication of which action is summarized by the film's title.

One reason viewers are more than likely to associate Anna and not Philip with the title is because *Indiscreet* clearly functions as a reference to the earlier pairing of a younger and more sexually tense Grant and Bergman in *Notorious*; the comparison between these two films is historically revealing, not the least for understanding how forties notoriety can be transmuted into fifties indiscretion. In the 1946 Hitchcock film, Bergman/Alicia Huberman appears to confirm every one of Grant/Devlin's suspicions about the duplicity of women, which he himself motivates since he is the one who repeatedly places her in that 'notorious', not to say dangerous, position of espionage and promiscuity (the two are comparable, as far as this film goes). As others have noticed, the film indicates a dark, sadistic streak in the Cary Grant persona, especially since his manipulation of Bergman is in large part motivated by his character's desire to punish her active sexuality. By contrast, the 1957 Stanley Donen film reteamed Grant and Bergman after her return to Hollywood's good graces and a second Oscar; and now, though he does not marry her, Grant is overly concerned with preserving her reputation (in a plot gesture which must surely have seemed ironically apt at the time): Philip takes an apartment one floor below Anna's; he pretends to say goodnight over the phone so the switchboard operator will not suspect him of spending the night upstairs; he takes the stairs rather than the elevator for the same reason, and so forth. 'He is the most considerate, unselfish, honourable man I've ever known', Anna says of her lover, a description which would certainly *not* apply to the 'Cary Grant' of the Hitchcock film a decade before but is another sign of his fifties landmark status as the consummate gentleman lover, protector of

the fairer sex and preserver of her virtue – or at least, for as far as it goes.

Indiscreet therefore does not mean to question Philip's virility, which it represents in nationalistic terms: not only does he possess all the charm, sophistication, wealth, and good looks associated with 'Cary Grant', but he is an exemplary American capitalist to boot, visiting London because he is scheduled to deliver a keynote speech on currency to a banquet attended by a thousand people. However, all is not as it seems, for what is *actually* wrong with Philip, it appears, is that he is, in Margaret's apt phrasing, 'single – he's a single bachelor!' This bachelor masquerades as a married man in order, as he explains, to have all the benefits of sexual relations with women without the commitment; which is another way of saying that his disguise allows him to be a playboy bachelor without in any way impugning his masculinity. As overly punctilious about what he refers to as 'the rules between grownup men and women' as any character in a Jane Austen novel, Philip turns inside out the usual comic situation (where the predatory married man cheats on his wife by pretending to be a bachelor), posing as a married man when he is in fact a bachelor in order to have his cake, and his sense of honour too.

This becomes clear when, after Margaret's husband Alfred (Cecil Parker) learns the truth and asks him 'Why do you pretend to be a married man when you're not . . . you must admit, it doesn't sound honourable', Philip tries to explain his position. I quote their dialogue in full from the soundtrack because it summarizes the cultural pressures on the character of Philip and the masculinity he represents for the film – as a masquerading bachelor negotiating his way around the desire for sexual freedom on the one hand and the deep blue sea of immaturity and irresponsibility on the other (and remember, too, that this is a middle-aged Cary Grant speaking the lines):

- Philip: Now, just try to follow this. Let's just take, uh, the usual case. A man meets a woman. He is attracted to her. They're old enough and she, uh, favours him. Eventually, she'd like to get married. He then says, 'I am not the marrying kind'. Now do you admire such a man?
- Alfred: No, I don't, but go on.
- Philip: Well, I don't care to get married. On the other hand, I don't care to give up women.
- Alfred: (*laughing*) I understand that.
- Philip: Now, since I have no intention of getting married, I feel honour-bound to declare myself from the beginning.
- Alfred: But, before the favour?

- Philip: Certainly before the favour, that's where the honour comes in. . . . Now, how do I declare myself? By saying, 'I will never marry'? What woman really believes that? If anything it will be a challenge to her.
- Alfred: Then what do you do?
- Philip: I say I am married. I'm married and I can't get a divorce. Now our position is clear. There can't be any misunderstanding later.

In sum, since Philip does not want to give up women, he believes he is honour-bound to deceive them by pretending to be married. His pretence then establishes the proper code of conduct for their relationship: once told he is not what he is, namely a bachelor, Anna cannot possibly expect him to propose, so he has forever deferred the question of marriage while still being able to accept, as he puts it, her 'favours'. However, once Anna finds out that Philip has been lying to her, she is quite understandably furious and plots to even the score with a masquerade of her own – until it blows up in her face. 'You lied and cheated', she accuses after the dust settles, to which he replies: 'I was honest. I played by the rules. . . . What can a man do but stick by the rules?' Knowing his passion for rules, Anna then proposes they go on as before, 'and not be married'. 'Not be married?' Philip asks incredulously, 'that's the most improper thing I've ever heard', adding, 'Women are *not* the sensitive sex. That's one of the true delusions of literature. Men are the true romanticists'. And then to prove it, he proposes again, confirming that all along his masquerade has merely served to deny his own monogamous nature.

To be sure, in its narrative outline, *Indiscreet* marks the very division of sexual labour one expects of fifties comedy: in this battle of the sexes, the male has the power to choose, abuse, but not to lose, the female. With Philip's confidence restored by the crying Anna, the closing moments of their reunion mark a clear sexual differentiation between the sadistic male who has played the trick and the masochistic female who has suffered through it. Character details amplify this difference. Philip Adams is rich, successful, honourable, and sentimental – these four traits summarizing his considerable appeal not only to Anna but also to NATO, which has wooed him for an important position in Europe. And Anna Kalman is a famous London stage actress, recognized and pursued by fans wherever she goes: she and not Philip is the one associated with spectacle, performance, and role-playing. Not surprisingly, in the film's climax, she engineers an elaborate theatrical scheme to avenge his deception by making him jealous. 'What a performance', her sister Margaret observes, 'too bad the critics can't see this'. To which Alfred adds: 'There's no sincerity like a woman telling a lie'.

In many respects, then, *Indiscreet* reads like a rather

unexceptional sex comedy, not the least because the maturing appearance of middle-aged Cary Grant in the fifties would appear to reinforce without any qualification whatsoever the conservative, patriarchal and repressive masculinity typified by the character of Philip Adams. However, just the opposite holds true in this case precisely because *Indiscreet* recognizes the extent to which Grant's star image had indeed become inseparable from the referential field of his longevity as a leading man. As a result, the film text cannot simply endorse its closure's recuperation of active, sadistic male/passive, masochistic female, for Grant's screen persona exceeds that reductive sexual binary.

To start with, as the exemplary tall, dark and handsome male star 'Cary Grant' always stands for male beauty and desirability, whether in a thirties screwball, a forties film noir, or a fifties romantic comedy. He consequently turns around the orthodox gendered difference between the one who looks (and so desires) and the one who is looked at (and so is being desired). *Notorious*, for instance, trades upon this significant element of Grant's appeal when introducing his character: he first appears in silhouette with his back to the camera, recognizable only by the shape of his head, as Bergman turns from her guests to him and asks, 'How about you, handsome? Haven't I seen you someplace before?' There follows a dissolve to the next scene, after all the partygoers have gone, and the camera pans around to reveal his famous profile which competes with Bergman's for the viewer's attention. Likewise, in *The Bachelor and the Bobby Soxer*, Grant is blatantly appreciated for his good looks by all the women in the film, young or old. It seems as if anyone who lays eyes upon Grant's character, Richard Nugent, swoons at the sight of him: as he steps up to a high-school podium to talk about art history, the polite applause turns into a thunderous ovation as soon as the young women get a glimpse of his handsome face, and afterwards one of them whistles at him as he walks by. One female character finally explains his appeal to the sole Doubting Thomas, Myrna Loy, like this: 'A guy who never goes out of a girl's mind. He just stays there', she adds, 'like a heavy meal'.

Richard Schickel believes that *The Bachelor and the Bobby Soxer* marks the first time Grant appeared on film 'as what he had become in fact over the past decade to his bedazzled female beholders – a perfect dreamboat – or, to borrow a phrase from the most bedazzled of them [namely, Shirley Temple] "the man from dream city"'.²¹ But while this film may be the first to make overt extratextual reference to Grant's status as a movie star in a way that was to become increasingly common in his postwar films, Schickel is in error insofar as Hitchcock had already made similar use of Grant's celebrated face and its attractiveness to the female character/viewer in *Notorious*, as I have already indicated; and also even earlier than



21 Richard Schickel, *Cary Grant: A Celebration* (Boston: Little Brown, 1983), p. 143

Shirley Temple's fantasy of
Cary Grant as she watches
him lecture at her high school
in *The Bachelor and the
Bobby Soxer*



that, in *Suspicion* (1941), when Joan Fontaine first sees him on the train.

If in the forties Grant's screen appeal was already equated with his irresistible good looks, then by the late fifties, when he made *Indiscreet*, he had become famous for his celebrated, instantly recognizable, five-by-ten glossy of a face – ever tanned, ever handsome, ever the same. Throughout the fifties, Grant's irresistible good looks never coarsened with age but continued openly to attract the gaze of the female spectator, onscreen as well as off, often making her and not him the sexual aggressor, no matter what their difference in ages. The seduction scenes in the two fifties Hitchcock films, *To Catch a Thief* and *North by Northwest*, when the cool, sophisticated and younger blonde becomes aroused enough by his looks to break with convention and put the moves on him, exemplify the extent to which 'Cary Grant' signified desirable maleness and hence active sexual excitement in women. In contrast to the way Tony Curtis has to gull Marilyn Monroe into being the aggressor in *Some Like It Hot*, Grant does not need to trick a woman into acting upon her desire for him; he simply has to let her look at him (which is sometimes, as in Hitchcock's films, the reason for her danger).

While other male stars of the same magnitude were, to be sure, also paired with much younger female stars (Grace Kelly, Eva Marie Saint, Sophia Loren, Audrey Hepburn), it was the spectacle of his apparently unchanging face which continued to prove that Grant was somehow different from them. As Schickel puts it, with a hyperbole probably indicative of what Grant signified as a star to fifties audiences:

For something singular, something entirely without precedent in movie history, in any kind of history, for that matter, happened in the life of Cary Grant, therefore in our perception of him and our relationship with him. That is, very simply, that some time in his fifties, while he still looked as if he were in his forties – happily combining an elegant and easeful maturity with an undiminished capacity for playfulness – he simply ceased to age. Just plain stopped. As far as we in the audience could see.²²

Grant's apparent agelessness must have resonated quite forcefully for a culture discovering the fragility of the male body when it came to stress and heart disease, not to mention the findings of Kinsey; and this feature explains a good deal about the popular force behind his continuing to play bachelors in romantic comedies while well into middle age.

Grant's postwar films selfconsciously acknowledge this important extratextual dimension of his star image through both verbal and visual references to his famous looks. Often giving Grant the kind of glamorous buildup usually reserved for female stars, the films of this period play up his desirability as a male through the closeups that introduce him and make his face comparable with the female lead's (as in *An Affair to Remember*), or even superior to hers (as in *Houseboat* [1958]); and his recognizable face became something of an in-joke in the late fifties, as when he himself says to Eva Marie Saint in *North by Northwest*, 'I know, I look vaguely familiar . . . you feel like you've seen me before . . . I know, I have that effect on people. It must be my face'. An even more telling moment occurs later in that same film when he sneaks though a woman's hospital room, and she *twice* tells him to stop, the second time after she has got a better look at him with her glasses on.

His postwar status as the perfect 'dreamboat' desired by women of all ages is thus a crucial component of Grant's playboy bachelor roles, and *Indiscreet* is no exception. Consequently, while in its premiss and plotting the film's narrative may exemplify the conservative direction of the sex comedy genre, the complex intertextual field of what 'Cary Grant' meant in the fifties as the epitome of a desirable male gives his bachelor's masquerade in the story a rather unconventional turn in a number of significant ways.

For instance, the film makes much of the fact that Anna takes the same pleasure in looking at Philip that an audience does in watching Grant. Applying cold cream to her face and reassuring her sister that she is not depressed because she lacks a man, Anna is struck silent by the sight of Philip appearing out of nowhere in her doorway (the audience can see him for a moment before she turns around to insist that she is not depressed). Philip's entrance here reminds us that Grant's considerable screen presence depends upon his ability to attract a spectator's gaze, and we have to recall both

his and the character's status as an object of vision many times throughout the film. An enrapt Anna watches him deliver his speech, with Bergman placed in much the same position as Shirley Temple when Grant lectures on art at her high school in *The Bachelor and the Bobby Soxer*. Following the lecture, when Philip has a drink in Anna's apartment, she describes it as a scene she is watching: 'I like a man with a glass in his hand. It's becoming. . . . [But] you have to sip it now and then. It's part of the picture'. Also, after Philip announces his supposed marital status, he apologizes for his vanity in making that declaration so abruptly; the implication being, he goes on, that *she* couldn't keep her hands off him, presumably because of *his* good looks. ('Now you'll never know', she comments in reply.)

The film further clarifies Anna's attraction to Philip's good looks through its editing, which continues to remind us that Grant is indeed very much a part of this picture, with a spectacular value the equal of Bergman's. He is first viewed from a distance in the doorway, with a medium closeup shot of Bergman looking, followed by one of Calvert and Parker. A shift to his viewpoint, with the back of his head anchoring the frame, shows Bergman in medium shot, with the others behind her; a cut back to Grant in the doorway then motivates a repeat of the first sequence of medium closeups of Calvert and Parker, then of Bergman; and as he enters the room, moving towards her (while saying that he has seen her on the stage), the editing returns to his visual perspective, showing Bergman in medium shot, feeling selfconscious about the cold cream on her face (suggesting her awareness of being looked at by him in the present as if she were on stage). A cut back to Grant, now framed in *plan américain*, motivates a closeup of a glowing Bergman, which is in turn matched by one of him, then her, then him, with a return to medium shots to bring in the other two characters, then another sequence of matching closeups, all to establish the stars' mutual attraction through their mutual gaze. Later, when Grant returns to her apartment after the lecture and 'confesses' that he is married, the editing reverses the earlier sequence of shots: Bergman remains in closeup looking at him (and apparently deciding he is worth the risk), while Grant moves into a medium and then three-quarter shot as he leaves the room.

This type of editing characterizes the visual style of the entire film and, particularly with its frequent recourse to closeups, it defines Grant (and his attractiveness) through Bergman's optical point of view, establishing the crucial visual distance between them which permits her to indulge in the same voyeuristic pleasure of looking that he does. Thus, in the elevator as they go to her apartment presumably to consummate their affair, they stand in the same frame in profile, staring at each other intently and, visually speaking at least, on equal terms. The next morning the perfect mating of this





couple – ‘We’re right for each other’, she says at one point in their romance. ‘We’re good for each other’ – is made evident in matching closeups, each gorgeous face alternately filling the screen as they speak to each other on the telephone.

Along with the camera’s considerable attention to his face through the kind of shot setups described, the mannered idiom of Grant’s acting style in *Indiscreet*, as in his other films, further reminds an audience that his characteristic voice, delivery, smile, timing, and double takes all function together as the trademarked signature of his performance as ‘Cary Grant’. In contrast to Bergman’s warmer, more naturalistic style of acting, his is all the more obviously a fabrication of particular effects, sharpened to the finest of turns. As I have already suggested, one reason for Grant’s enduring popular appeal was the playful mobility of his screen identity as made evident in his performance style; which suggests how one can inhabit the shifting spaces between the mask and its referent, between the signification of masculinity and the male identity it produces. James Naremore’s assessment of his performance style in *North by Northwest* applies to the star’s acting generally, especially during the fifties:

He was an emotionally reserved actor whose work was engineered to fit the precise needs of a given sequence. He was so conscious of posture and ostensiveness that he could perform the same action again and again, looking good in the retakes and never spoiling the rhythm of a sequence. He effected small actions with absolute clarity, never complicating them with unnecessary movement. At the same time he had technical control over *degrees* of expression, so that he could produce a series of distinctly shaded reactions in close-up – little pieces of behavior that could be laid out on an editing table and used to structure a line of narrative.²³

Organized in this manner as an ensemble of predictable (which is not by any means to say unpleasurable) signifying effects, Grant’s trademark performance style is inseparable from his screen persona as the quintessential leading man of American romantic comedy. *Indiscreet* makes continual reference to the relation between his star image and his acting style in the editing of his performance through closeups, which direct attention to his apparently ageless face. His face functions for the apparatus in a variety of ways as a mask – as, literally, an image transformed by cinema into an icon of romantic masculinity – particularly because so much of his meaning for Hollywood film depended upon his passive spectacular quality as the ideal male pinup.

Grant’s star image thus readily lends itself to the masquerade as the ground for representing a male sexual identity, which is why the role in *Indiscreet* so well epitomizes the range of contradictory

²³ James Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 225

24 Naremore, in fact, calls Grant 'the ideal fashion model', *ibid.*, p. 217.

meanings his screen persona enables. When Philip complains to Anna, who has found him out and started to pay him back in kind, 'You've been in a dozen different moods, most of which I've never seen before', she retorts, 'Mystery, my stock in trade, I'm a woman'. But the story's premiss has actually relied on her remaining quite a clear character, unwavering in her love and appreciation of Philip, and on his remaining not 'transparent', as she earlier says of him when ignorant of his disguise, but something of the opposite, a man with the opaque surface of a fashion mannequin.²⁴ The supposed sincerity of female deceit notwithstanding, there is no question that Philip's sincerity (not to say his skill) in lying *is* much greater than that of Anna, the professional actress; and this comic situation has the effect of placing the masquerading bachelor in what the text defines elsewhere as feminine terrain. By having Grant engage in such deception and theatrical role-playing, *Indiscreet* ends up reproducing in the diegesis the very signs of his acting, emphasizing his performance style and screen presence over his character's narrative power, a stress which has traditionally connoted feminine exhibitionism and display in opposition to a Hollywood brand of virility connoted by male voyeurism and action.

These signature elements of Grant's star image play up theatricality over authenticity – in contrast with most American film actors of the studio era; and they ground the basis of his appealing screen persona as Hollywood's consummate dreamboat in a male masquerade, a *performance* of masculinity no different from Philip Adams's pretence to be a married man when he is in fact a bachelor – with all that this figure connoted about male rebellion and sexual discontent in the fifties. As Billy Wilder's reference to him in *Some Like It Hot* implied, Grant's screen persona took his own age, class, nationality, sexual orientation, even his marital status (he was not yet divorced from Betsy Drake), and refashioned these seemingly unalterable features into the very emblematic signs of the ever-youthful American bachelor business man. The reference to Grant in *Some Like It Hot* recognizes this significant feature of his meaning for Hollywood cinema, just as it also acknowledges, through recuperation as a joke about emasculation, what Grant's star image disturbingly implies as an effect of this male masquerade – but that recuperation, the Wilder film makes clear, is in its turn just another male masquerade. This is why, I suspect, so many of Grant's films could so easily make his act of masquerading so crucial to their narratives and why, as well, even his middle-aged postwar screen persona so successfully blurred the difference between effeminacy and virility, those two poles which defined manliness for American culture throughout the fifties.

reports and debates

New film histories and the politics of location

ALISON BUTLER

The centenary of cinema approaches at a time when the return to history in film studies has been well under way for a few years. The growth of a new historicism in film studies has been accompanied by a decline in the activist tradition that characterized *Screen* in particular in the 1970s, for reasons which are obvious and reasons which are not. The most obvious reason is that countercinema theory relied on a capacity on the part of the theorist to envisage some kind of future for the cinema, which cultural, political and technological changes have made difficult to sustain. However, the utopian reflex of a lifetime is hard to kick: the new film historians, like Lacan's child in front of the mirror, are discovering what *will have been*.¹ The history of the cinema is more than the object of nostalgia, and more than a set of past events which precision research methods can reconstitute. Histories, as Walter Benjamin pointed out, are discourses of legitimation inextricably connected to the present and the future. What is included, what is left out, and what types of explanation are proffered are all extremely important issues, as is the question of who speaks and to whom.

I shall focus here on two examples of historical/theoretical practices that have emerged in recent years and that are likely to bear on the shapes that will be assumed by the history of the cinema in coming years. The choice of these, one from the USA and one from France, is determined by their differences and samenesses, and by a certain strategic value based on the UK's position at a geographical and cultural crossroads between France and North America. This is by no means to suggest that these will be the only

¹ For an account of the temporality of the Mirror Stage, see Jane Gallop, *Reading Lacan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 74–92.

2 'Futures', a conference organized by Middlesex Polytechnic and the art history journal *Block* at the Tate Gallery, London, November 1990.

influences on British film studies in the near future. On the contrary, it is intended to explain a heartfelt hope that we will draw inspiration from further afield.

Some of what follows is very speculative, arising from a comment made by Meaghan Morris at a recent conference on postmodernism: 'When I hear the word "Europe", I think of war'.² This set me thinking about the way geographical space, and particularly the spaces of nation states and power blocs, inhabit discourses that are ostensibly about other things. In considering my two examples, I shall attempt to locate some of the undisclosed burdens of the national, starting from the premise that if the manifest material of cinema histories is time, its other major determinant is place. In the process, I shall be concerned not only with the location of histories but also with the location of historians within national cultural frameworks. This will involve some discussion of intranational territorial gambits, the processes by which intellectuals carve out a space for themselves, and the casualties of those processes. Put crudely, then, my question is: where are the new film histories coming from?

Contemporary scholarly film history in the English language has undergone major changes since the 1970s. Prior to this, the majority of histories of the cinema fell into two types: mythmaking popular histories with their lists of geniuses and first times; and reflectionist histories which posited cinema as the mirror of the social. Both types have been widely rejected as unscholarly, short on empirical data, and founded on unreliable hermeneutics. The new film histories have tried to define their own methodologies in clear distinction from those of the old. In general, three strategies have been followed in order to accomplish this: first, cinema is separated from its broader sociocultural context and treated as an autonomous artistic-industrial practice; second, questions of thematics and representation are displaced by detailed analysis of form; third, individual films are rarely subjected to interpretive critiques. Histories with these characteristics, mostly North American, have recently been termed 'revisionist'.

This radical and restrictive redefinition of the field of the film historian's (and also the film theorist's) competence demands some explanation. The arguments advanced by revisionist film historians have tended to rest on notions of materialism, a keyword in the vocabulary of the post-1968 left intelligentsia; and many of the excisions which have restructured the agenda of film history have followed a pattern broadly in keeping with left critical theory: we no longer speak of masters and masterpieces, we rigorously avoid vulgar reflectionism, shun positive images, and wouldn't be caught dead speaking teleologically. Revisionist film history is but one of the ways of writing about cinema that shares these attributes (or

ambitions), but this is one that most vociferously claims rigour and accuracy on the grounds of its empirical bases. What makes this possible is the particular inflection given to the notion of materialism by revisionists: the materiality in question is understood as that of art, rather than that of culture as, (*pace* Raymond Williams), 'a whole way of life'. Thus the price paid by revisionist film history for its secure empirical bases has been the evacuation of the post-68 cultural-political agenda which originally foregrounded the need for a materialist approach.

Does this make revisionist history nonpolitical? A detour through a comparable development in history proper shows that the consequences of apparently neutral refinements of scholarly method can be highly political. In a discussion of the role of revisionism in British social and political history, Perry Anderson has noted the disappearance of the grand narratives of progress that predominated in the pre-68 period *and* those of class that predominated through the early 1970s. British history, in his account, has returned to the 'particular and the piecemeal, the contingent and the episodic': 'Just as sociology discovered the macro-historical, history itself was going micro-archival.' In this new history, continuity prevails over change and the landmarks of the old histories have been absorbed into a bland 'featureless terrain' across which wander 'assorted ideologies of a resurgent Right'. The opening gambit in this strategic reorientation is the construction of a combined and hyphenated phobic object: 'a common Whig-Marxist syndrome as a prime obstacle to historical understanding'.³ Whilst this example has little to do with film history aside from the common term 'revisionism', it serves to draw attention to the similar manner in which revisionist film history seems to have swept the field of large-scale explanations, *its* opening ideological gambit the construction of a combined Bazin-Comolli phobic object, its methodology precisely microarchival, the resulting terrain heaped with dates, names and facts, but tending to emphasize continuity over change in its major period, 1917 to 1960.

The publication which has perhaps done most to fix these historical markers is David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson's *Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*. The use of the term 'classical' is justified early in the book by the need to circumscribe Hollywood's 'group style', by the customary currency of the term (traced back to a number of French critics including, interestingly, Bazin), and by Hollywood's own aesthetic principles: 'decorum, proportion, formal harmony, respect for tradition, mimesis, self-effacing craftsmanship and cool control of the reader's response'.⁴ The attributes cited here are more or less concurrent with those that feature in most dictionary definitions of classicism, which also treat it as a *style* rather than a device for periodizing, although they place more emphasis on its standing (high) and value (the best). If the term is treated as a

3 Perry Anderson, 'A culture in contraflow, part II', *New Left Review*, no. 182 (1990), pp. 85-137.

4 David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), p. 4.

5 Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the philosophy of history', in Hannah Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), p. 258.

historical one, a rather different picture emerges – contradictory, but at times resembling Benjamin's procession of cultural treasures with origins the cultural materialist cannot contemplate without horror:⁵ universal, transnational, impersonal, classicism has expressed the cultural confidence of strong nations and cannot be applied to the organic artistic forms of minority or subaltern cultures without some loss of meaning.

The concept 'classical', pushed to its logical conclusion by Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson (whichever way it's taken), has remapped the terrain of US film history to exclude or diminish most of the privileged sites of Anglophone film studies before the mid 1980s. The successive focal points of film studies within the gravitational sphere of *Screen* in the 1970s – the authored text, the transgressive text and the spectator's text – implied the presence within Hollywood cinema of a number of minority cinemas, some as large as a whole genre or cycle (film noir), others as small as one film (*Dance, Girl, Dance* [Dorothy Arzner, 1940]), defined by a combination of stylistic and social aberrance. Some of these categories simply disappear without trace, (for example, the woman's film of the 1940s and films by women), others are carefully argued into closer alignment with the industrial-stylistic paradigms that produce classicism's continuity (for example, film noir, Welles, and deep focus).

The Classical Hollywood Cinema has met with a mixed reception, and has generated a certain amount of critical Tom and Jerry. Perhaps the single most controversial thing about it and other books by the same authors has been the way questions of representation and interpretation have been dealt with, being either deferred (*The Classical Hollywood Cinema*) or cited as the locus of fanciful critical projections (*Making Meaning*).⁶ This has raised a serious question: can film history be written without reckoning with the manifest and latent content of films and without reference to social contexts of production and reception? If it can, and is, are certain types of question effectively being defined as illegitimate? This is a very important issue for feminists and other subaltern groups working with film, with real consequences for the future of a discipline and of its practitioners. As Patrice Petro has pointed out in her assessment of the effects on feminist work of the current configuration of the return to history in cinema scholarship:

... the repeated call for greater rigor in film studies, an argument typically cast in terms of a need for archival research and hard empirical study, has had the additional effect of implying that feminists working in film theory have had relatively little to say about questions of film history. As a result, it would appear from the writings of some film scholars that a certain division of labor has come to characterize film studies as a discipline in which

6 David Bordwell, *Making Meaning* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989). See V. F. Perkins's review, 'Must we say what they mean? film criticism and interpretation', *Movie*, nos 34–5 (1991), pp. 1–6.

7 Patrice Petro, 'Feminism and film history', *Camera Obscura*, no. 22 (1990), p. 9.

'historians' pursue the realm of the empirical, and quantifiable, the concretely known (the realm of history proper), and 'feminists' explore the more intangible realm of theoretical speculation (the realm of interpretation).⁷

If in film studies subaltern interpretation risks being consigned to the margins, North American culture as 'a whole way of life' tells another story: the Robert Mapplethorpe case and the political storm over the Smithsonian exhibition *The West as America* have made the cultural politics of interpretation one of the privileged arenas of US public life. Some participants in these debates have made a point of connecting the latter's critique of America's 'Manifest Destiny' with the state of higher education:

Ever since the 1960s, the one-time campus radicals of the Baby Boom generation have sought repeatedly and noisily to rewrite the rules of American society in ways large and small. . . . On the campuses they seized by force in the 1960s and 1970s they have moved from early demands as students for such things as black studies programmes to efforts as tenured professors to reshape not only the core curriculum of American higher education but its value system as well. . . . Ageing radicals now as teachers and curators are increasingly in charge of the nation's cultural patrimony.⁸

8 Quoted from *The Washington Post* in *The Guardian*, 13 June 1991.

While ageing radicals are reading the nation's patrimony against the grain in Washington, there are reports that their youthful charges on the campuses are simply trashing it. Thus a story filed in *The Independent on Sunday* from North Carolina tells how the graduation class of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill donated a sculpture to their *alma mater*: seven standing figures, a white male professor and a group of students including a submissive white woman encircled by the arm of a tall white man, an Asian woman with books and a violin, an African-American woman carrying books on her head, and an African-American man holding a basketball. When outraged students began dismantling the statue *it was repaired and removed to a less prominent setting*.⁹ Its defence, in a debate about campus politics which George Bush has now joined, was mounted in terms of *free speech*.

9 Edward Lucas, 'Free speech falls to the campus thought police', *The Independent on Sunday*, 9 June 1991. As its title indicates, this article may not be a reliable source of information.

In this context, it is impossible not to notice a certain serendipitous occupational fringe benefit that would appear likely to result from the revisionists' own repair to a less prominent setting: a disciplinary neutrality which should present no obstacle to institutional legitimacy. Where film theory in the first half of the century was mobilized to secure cinema itself as the Seventh Art, film studies in the last part of the century has often seemed far more concerned with securing itself as a legitimate academic discipline. Michel de Certeau has identified the process of the assimilation of

10 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

11 Ibid., p. 7. All subsequent quotations from de Certeau are from pp. 6–8.

professionals into the systems they administer (first middle managers and technicians, then writers and teachers) as characteristic of contemporary first world societies.¹⁰ From this process, a new type of intellectual has emerged, now ‘common in this society, to the point of becoming its generalized figure’:¹¹ the Expert. This figure is presented in counterpoint to his predecessor and uncanny double, the Philosopher. Where the Philosopher’s practice was characterized by vulnerability to the everyday (‘ordinary questions become a sceptical principle in a technical field’), the Expert operates in the mode of *insertion*. Distended between unprecedented specialization and the exigency of communication, the Expert mediates between society and a body of knowledge by commuting that (‘scientific’) knowledge to symbolic authority, free from the troublesome task that fell to the Philosopher (‘the specialist of the universal’) of ‘re-establish(ing) the relevance of general questions to a particular technique’, and relieved of its awkward corollary – accountability to the laity.

If sexual and cultural difference, those borders within the nation, are not relevant to the project of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, the question of the national – given that this is a national cinema history – must be confronted in some guise. The unique status of Hollywood as a cultural producer situated mainly in one or two districts of a large conurbation on the West Coast of the USA, but serviced by a worldwide distribution system, makes the national a problematic dimension. This is addressed most fully in the book’s final chapter, ‘Alternative modes of film practice’. Here, the paradigm of colonialism – as dominance rather than as a pattern of unequal exchanges – is introduced to explain Hollywood’s unusual situation, for example, in the sentence: ‘Hollywood did not limit its colonizing to Europe.’¹²

The effects of Hollywood’s international dominance on production outside the USA are discussed in terms of ‘imitation’ – on the grounds that ‘the accessibility of Hollywood to international audiences made it a transnational standard – and of ‘national film styles’, thus neatly extending the book’s thesis concerning standardization and differentiation in the US industry to global film production. Where product differs substantially from that of Hollywood, nationally specific styles are read in terms of a distinct politics of the national:

Nationalist strategies continue to the present; the most recent examples are the Australian cinema and the anti-colonialist cinema of Third World countries.

The chapter closes with an affirmation of the binary coordinates of world cinema, Hollywood and non-Hollywood:

12 Bordwell et al., *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, p. 378. All subsequent quotations from this work are from pp. 378–85.

The historical and aesthetic importance of the classical Hollywood cinema lies in the fact that to go beyond it we must go through it.

What is striking about this account is the baldness with which it forecloses the possibility of any third scenario. There are in fact a number of possibilities to consider. We might allow for the existence of cinematic Inappropriate Others, for example, in assessing the relation between Satyajit Ray and Rossellini or between Khumar Shahani and Godard. Where alterity to Hollywood is not triangulated by a cinematic third party, we might apply the notion of the 'productive misreading', a process identified by Thomas Elsaesser in his history of New German Cinema.¹³ What happens when a text crosses national or other borders? There is mounting evidence that the refunctionalization of texts is not just a manifestation of occasional resistances, but the very condition of possibility of such border crossings. Productive – and indeed, unproductive – misreading is perhaps the paradigmatic operation which governs the reception of films outside – and sometimes inside – their original national contexts.

Even as we in western Europe appropriate the films of Ousmane Sembene or Charles Burnett as art cinema, Hollywood films will also be subject to sea changes in transit. Where the forcefulness with which Hollywood product has been inserted into the market does indeed seem to produce imitation, we might usefully apply the concept of the mould, suggested by the authors of *International Image Markets*¹⁴ to describe the effects of format on patterns of meaning, whilst leaving ourselves the freedom to notice the marks of another imaginary.

Finally, we might consider the possibility that some films neither imitate nor oppose some or all of the codes of Hollywood cinema: they simply give priority instead to more localized approaches to cultural codification. Teshome Gabriel has drawn attention to Sembene's *Emitai* (1972) as one such film,¹⁵ its slow pacing and avoidance of the closeup reflecting neither ignorance nor avant-gardist opposition to Hollywood style, but consideration of its content – rural collectivity in colonial Africa – and its addressees – people familiar with this history. The notion of formal codes that are isolable from contents and contexts becomes unsustainable when these ideas are taken on board; and it becomes necessary to think cinema in terms of geographically specific, historically accrued modes of making sense. The alternative has been identified by Paul Willemen as a 'film theoretical malpractice' whereby

the Hollywood model of character narration is accepted as the norm in Euro-American film studies, [and] the modes of studying Hollywood and its counter-cinemas have been presented as equally universal and normative, duplicating and confirming the position of economic power enjoyed by Hollywood.¹⁶

13 Thomas Elsaesser, *New German Cinema* (London: Macmillan, 1989).

14 Armand Mattelart, Xavier Delcourt and Michelle Mattelart, *International Image Markets: In Search of an Alternative Perspective*, trans. David Buxton (London: Comedia, 1984).

15 Teshome Gabriel, 'Teaching Third World cinema', *Screen*, vol. 24, no. 2 (1983), p. 62.

16 Paul Willemen, 'The national', unpublished paper, 1990.

If we remember that Hollywood cinema, for all its international economic success, is a national cinema, we must conclude that to go beyond Hollywood classicism it may not be necessary to go through it; and that where this detour is in fact the route taken, the vicissitudes of the journey may be complexly determined by factors well beyond the scope of product standardization and differentiation.

This may seem a minor point of dispute, but if we look at current production practices in Europe it becomes clear that the available alternatives for the future of European cinema are being constructed precisely according to the logic of economic competition through stylistic imitation. The first effects of this approach can be seen in a couple of headlines in a recent edition of *Variety*:

EUROCASH PUMPS LIFE INTO CANNES MARKET

under which appears the story:

Millions of dollars in new coin, mostly from cash-rich European players, are pouring into the international film business. This influx . . . is shaping the independent film biz of the future.

This sounds like a considerable change, but lower down the page we find:

CANNES COPYCATS BLUR BORDERS HUNTING HOLLYWOOD STYLE

followed by the story:

The Cannes Film Festival has been Yanked. . . . With international coproductions now a way of life here, dozens of Euro films eschewed local tradition and gave way to English-lingo tracks and mock Hollywood styles and values.¹⁷

The point of this digression is not nostalgia for pristine national cultural identities, but concern that the struggle for culture has been conceptualized so poorly as to be completely assimilated by the struggle for markets *on the terms of those markets' major player*. The probable outcome of such a strategy in a world of increasingly unequal information flows may appear utopian from some perspectives and dystopian from others: *images sans frontières*. The reality will be more banal: multinational tussles resulting in a high degree of standardization and an unprecedentedly undemocratic global image culture.

In glancing at the French scene, I shall look at discourses normally categorized as theory rather than history, backing a guess that recent theoretical approaches will do more to shape film history and theory in the near future than will current historical practices.

Last winter, a major new multimedia exhibition was mounted at

17 *Variety*, 20 May 1991.

the Beaubourg in Paris. *Passages de l'image*, curated by Raymond Bellour, Catherine David and Christine Van Assche, posited a crisis of the image dating back to the invention of photography and successively deepening with the invention of film, video and the new visual technologies. The exhibition invited its visitors to trace convergences and divergences between the visual media, and signposted indications of the crisis of the image. Its approach implied a certain diagnostics: how do the symptoms of the crisis of the image present? A preliminary answer, based on a quick count of the national origins of the films included in the show, would be: they present in the West. Of the films screened in the Salle Garance, allowing a margin of error for the twelve I was unable to place, forty were French and thirty-seven American. While films from eleven other countries were included, there were no more than a dozen and usually less than half a dozen from each. If we look more closely at the films drawn from outside the West, we find that they generally entered the list via inclusion in the western art cinema canon – in the case of India, for example, one film by Satyajit Ray and one by Ritwik Ghatak were shown. The critical agenda of *Passages de l'image* provides an early indication of the influence of the recent work of Gilles Deleuze,¹⁸ which I suspect will be considerable, on canon construction, periodization and historical and theoretical method in French film criticism. What issues are thrown up by the fact that the selection of material for this exhibition stages the history of the cinema implicitly in terms of a Franco-American encounter?

Deleuze and his translators make a lot of noise about the fact that he has not written a history of the cinema: the author is a philosopher, known since the mid 1960s for a return to Henri Bergson, and these are philosophy books. Despite this, they say quite a lot about the history of the cinema, and viewed in this light, appear as a return to Bazin, albeit with Peirce. The first volume roughly covers the period up to the end of World War II, and the second opens with a discussion of postwar cinema centred on neorealism; and the sites of many debates familiar from Bazin are revisited: deep focus, the sequence shot, montage versus decoupage, the status of the frame, and, indeed, the ideas of Bergson.

At the end of the first volume, Deleuze lays out the basis for his periodization of the cinema quite explicitly:

It is first of all in Italy that the great crisis of the action-image took place. The timing is something like: around 1948, Italy; about 1958, France; about 1968, Germany.¹⁹

The war, he explains in the Preface to the second volume, is taken as a break because:

the post-war period has greatly increased the situations which we

¹⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986); and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: Athlone Press, 1989). See review in *Screen*, vol. 32, no. 2 (1991), pp. 238–43.

¹⁹ Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, p. 211.

20 Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, p. xi.

21 Sam Rohdie, 'Capital and realism in the Italian cinema', *Screen*, vol. 24, nos 4-5 (1983), pp. 37-46.

22 Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, p. 205.

23 Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, p. 171.

no longer know how to react to, in spaces which we no longer know how to describe²⁰

with the resultant decline of the movement-image and increase of the direct time-image. Neorealism, the French New Wave and New German Cinema are triggered by this crisis, the time lags accounted for by the manner of each nation's implication in the war: Italy leads the way, apparently largely uncompromised by its role in the war (although Sam Rohdie has disputed the construction of neorealism around this notion);²¹ France and Germany, compromised respectively by Vichy and the Third Reich, are politically too vulnerable to confront cultural crisis in the cinema until over ten years later in France's case, and a whole generation later in Germany's.

One of the striking things about this periodization is how at odds it is with the prevailing North American one; and indeed Deleuze has some difficulty dating the crisis in American cinema. Welles is cited as an early sign of the crisis, and Hitchcock – strategically treated here as English – transmits and defers its effects from a mid Atlantic position. Cassavetes, Altman and Scorsese exemplify the cinema after the crisis. Whereas in the case of three European countries we are given an approximate year, in the case of the USA Deleuze specifies no date within a period of twenty or so years, nor a localized cause more precise than 'the unsteadiness of the "American Dream" in all its aspects' and 'the crisis of Hollywood and its old genres'. To forestall the likely objection 'Crisis? What crisis?', he comments:

Certainly, people continue to make (action) films: the greatest commercial successes always take that route, but the soul of the cinema no longer does. . . .²²

In the second book he even pursues the soul into its institution:

There is a Catholic quality to the cinema (there are many explicitly Catholic authors, even in America, and those who are not have complex relationships with Catholicism).²³

At this point we might begin to wonder if there is not perhaps a *French* quality to the cinema, or at least its *soul*. Although Deleuze does not dwell on historical determinations, his main thesis certainly depends on them; and it is here that his lack of clarity on the American question seems crucial. If the crisis in the action-image is linked to a loss of belief in the notion 'that a global situation can give rise to an action which is capable of modifying it', derived ultimately from World War II, it becomes necessary to consider the extent to which the various nations were affected by the war. To expect the architect of the Marshall Plan to undergo a cultural crisis similar in scale and type to that experienced by a country which was

occupied during the war and compromised by a collaborationist regime is not realistic. It is hardly surprising, then, that in dating the American crisis Deleuze seems to invoke not only World War II but the entire period extending from the Korean War, through the Cold War and the Vietnam War, up to Watergate.

The notion of a crisis, which by its very nature resists the propriety of neat periodization, has recently become a familiar one in critical work on postmodernism. Postmodernism, the intellectualized response of the bourgeoisie to the many upheavals accompanying the rise of finance capitalism, can be situated within a further general problematic: that of the place of a certain type of intellectual within what is called postindustrial society. Implicitly acknowledging the difficulty of his work, Deleuze addresses the question of intellectual practice at the close of the second volume with an impassioned defence, in the spirit of de Certeau's philosopher confronted by a rising tide of Expertise, of the value of 'theory', beginning:

The usefulness of theoretical books on the cinema has been called into question (especially today, because the times are not right)

...

and ending:

Cinema itself is a new practice of images and signs, whose theory philosophy must produce as *conceptual practice*. For no technical determination, whether applied . . . or reflexive, is sufficient to constitute the concepts of cinema itself.²⁴

The problem of intellectual practice in postmodernity has been addressed by a number of writers, many of whom are French. An early example of this genre, useful for my purposes because it was written before discourses on postmodernism became too encrusted with self-referentiality, is Lyotard's report to the Council of Universities of the government of Québec, *The Postmodern Condition*.²⁵ The material context of this report is frequently forgotten, perhaps even by its author: a fact to which Meaghan Morris draws attention, in a very funny essay, by questioning the adequacy of the 'language games' methodology which renders economics a discourse genre. The method may seem to work when applied to the utterances Lyotard gives as examples: 'The university is sick', 'The university is open', and 'Give money to the university'; but what, asks Morris, would his method make of the pragmatics of the sentence 'You're fired'?²⁶ However, there are some quite clear signals in the text that a localized situation is being addressed. A dedication in the introduction redirects the book, not to the universities of Québec, but to the author's own employer, the University of Paris at Vincennes.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 280.

²⁵ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: a Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

²⁶ Meaghan Morris, 'Postmodernity and Lyotard's sublime', in *The Pirate's Fiancée* (London: Verso, 1988), p. 229.

²⁷ Simon Nora and Alain Minc, *The Computerization of Society: A Report to the President of France*, trans. Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1980). The introduction is by Daniel Bell.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 133–4.

³⁰ Mattelart et al., *International Image Markets*, p. 95.

Further references indicate a particularly topical address, of which a key reference, cited in footnotes and invoked through direct and indirect quotation, is probably Simon Nora and Alain Minc's bestseller, *The Computerization of Society*,²⁷ a report commissioned by President Giscard d'Estaing and published in France in 1978, a year before publication of *The Postmodern Condition*. The report is addressed to issues of technological modernization and their social consequences: its advice concerns the management of technological and social change, with the goal of a democratic information society. Nora and Minc are not in the least coy about their concerns, with chapter titles like 'Telematics and new power games' and 'Telematics and national independence'. A large portion of the latter chapter is devoted to the problem of IBM's dominance of the world information-processing market and the consequent imbalances in trade and power, with their implied threat to national sovereignty; while a section of the former, subtitled 'The Issue of Social Status', deals with a number of professions, including teaching, concluding that one effect of computerization will be that 'Specializations will fade away, and levels of teaching will become diversified. . . . Education will see its function distilled to one of coordinations, while more routine pedagogical tasks will be carried out by assistants'.²⁸ The authors contextualize this as a response to the economic and political situation of France after the energy crisis and the Yom Kippur war; and to something more general, termed a crisis of civilization, which sounds a lot like postmodernity. For example:

The information society does not fit (liberal and Marxist) analyses and predictions. Going beyond the world of production, it fashions its new requirements according to its own plan, its own regulatory models, and its own cultural model. It is the locus of an infinite number of decentralised, unexpressed conflicts that do not respond to a unifying analysis.²⁹

In the acknowledgements at the end of the report, senior civil servants and presidents of multinationals are named alongside Michel Foucault, Edgar Morin, Michel Serres and Alain Touraine, seeming to indicate that the emergence of new questions for France has begun to produce new alliances. As the authors of *International Image Markets* pointed out in 1983:

In France, it is only now, with the current political ebb, that the established institutions are rethinking their relationship to marginal areas of creativity. Is it not surprising that the most efficient managers of the restructuring of the communications industry are, in many European countries, former student revolutionaries (in France, participants in May 1968) who had once challenged the functioning of the media?³⁰

31 Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, p. 270.

32 Willemsen, 'The national'.

In brief, then, one way to locate Deleuze's 'conceptual practice' is as a response to the uneasy embrace of post-68 radical theorists by the mandarin class traditionally responsible for France's centralized planning; or, to name it another way, the convergence of poststructuralism and information technology. At this conjuncture it is not surprising that a work on philosophy and cinema should include amongst its conclusions the hypothesis that: 'The life or afterlife of cinema depends on its internal struggle with informatics'.³¹ What this sketch of a context brings to light is something referred to by Paul Willemsen as 'the unholy complicity between periodisation in history and the drawing or crossing of geographical boundaries'.³²

When we survey some of the discourses adjacent to Deleuze's, an explanation for his problems with periodization begins to propose itself: at least two separate historical markers have been compounded: World War II postwar reconstruction, a particularly European watershed; and the triumph of finance capital over industrial capital between the 1960s and the 1980s, a watershed with global implications but North American origins. The two markers are not only unsynchronized, they are qualitatively different. The former qualifies for the description 'crisis' in many respects. The latter manifests itself domestically as the ongoing recuperation, the constant patching up of crisis, that characterizes American capitalism: the fullblown crises of the system tend to take place outside the USA. This, it seems to me, has often been as true for culture as it has for economics. Thus the central premise of Deleuze's cinema books constitutes cinema in time at the expense of space in more than one way. It might even be true to say that his cinema of the time-image is haunted by the phantasmagoria of the decline and reconstitution of French power.

What conclusions can be drawn from all this? The obvious one is that it is precise to say that history takes *place*. The corollary would seem to be that the less film historians acknowledge their place, the more their work will be invaded by its concerns. The limit case of this will be those histories which assume the universality of either their object or their approach. These histories, produced in the West, will tend strongly to imperialism of one kind or another. In order to confront problems of periodization, we will need to examine our cultural-historical categories carefully, and to ask how they have functioned to temporalize spatial dominance. What, for example, does the concept of classicism imply about the state of development of cinemas outside Hollywood? Can we dismiss the traditional baggage of the term, given in dictionaries in terms of rank, standing, standards of excellence, good taste, clarity and refinement? Is there really an argument for the use of the term 'primitive' which can avoid temporalizing spatial dominance through

the concept of development? What are the risks of mobilizing the category of postmodernity, when we have still not figured out the relationship between cinema and modernity? If and when we shift from the problematic of modernity to that of postmodernity, what agenda are we assuming? Modernity, as discussed by Raymond Williams and others, was a concept capable of connecting art with major vectors of historical change and their spatial consequences: industrialization, urbanization and the migrations of cultures, resources and people produced by colonialism. Postmodernity, the critical mass of the coffee table, has so far tended to manifest itself in film and television studies via spectatorship and reception work in the form of the often announced replacement of production by consumption (in future, the kids of the First World will ask: 'Mummy, where do goods and services come from?'). It's hard to think of a formulation which does more than this one to render invisible whole parts of the globe and whole strata of society in the parts which remain (dimly) visible.

Beyond this, there are important methodological questions for film studies. If we are to contend with the differences within cinema, rather than reproducing it as one or another homogeneous version of the desired object, film theory and film history will have to reshape themselves towards something more like comparative film studies.³³ Work in this direction has already begun, though it may not always be immediately recognizable as such: work on Third Cinema is the most obvious example, with its double emphasis on cultural specificity and crosscultural hybridity. A feminist history such as Mary Anne Doane's *The Desire to Desire* may also qualify, as a comparative crossing of the border that is gender. Thomas Elsaesser's history of New German Cinema, written out of exile and at the point where the gazes of two audiences, the national and the international, meet, seems like a methodological step in the right direction. Histories such as these will not, I hope, lend involuntary aid to anti-theoretical tendencies in film studies: rather, they will recall our attention to the fact that it is as artificial to separate theory from history as it is to sever cinema from the world.

This paper was delivered at the Screen Studies Conference, Glasgow, June 1991.

³³ This idea is borrowed from Paul Willemen, *ibid.*

reports

The elusive 'real': AMFIT conference, London, 23-4 April 1992.

Questions of identity are invariably central to discussion in the humanities and social sciences, ranging (as they do) from issues of the formation of individual subjectivity through to concerns of institutional, disciplinary or political self-definition. Generally, of course, the most interesting – but also the most speculative – views are those on the relationship between these two different kinds of investigation of what we mean by 'identity'.

The third annual AMFIT conference (AMFIT = Association for Media, Film and Television Studies in Higher and Further Education) was no exception to the general tendency to tackle issues of identity during its various sessions; and, like all conferences, it also embedded problems of identity in the formal structures of the programme. What is perhaps surprising is that the root-and-branch reflection on (and scepticism about) the current dynamics and future of media studies which was given expression at the conference – with all the implications such doubts invite in terms of views of subjectivity, education and politics – could be conducted in an atmosphere of such apparent goodwill and good humour. If the full scale of the issues in question was genuinely appreciated in the debates which took place, then the constructive and amicable dialogue which made up this conference is definitely one favourable sign of the times.

The programme for the conference brought together plenary sessions with an explicit accent on the future ('Media Studies for the 1990s', plus two full sessions entitled 'New Initiatives', including contributions from the ITC and an academic publisher, Routledge, among others) and parallel sessions with more specialized themes (such as

'Developments in Post-16 Education and Training', 'Women, Deviance and Difference', 'Media Education and the National Curriculum', 'European Audio-Visual Industry and Culture'). Together, these various sessions had the formidable task of living up to the slightly enigmatic conference title, 'The Return of the Real: Media Studies in the 90s'. Despite frequent allusive glosses offered on it, however, that title managed to remain elusive, if only because the term 'real' was drawn on during the proceedings in at least three different senses: that of a fresh pragmatism, facing up to a changed and changing media and educational environment; that of representational 'realism', with all its cultural and philosophical difficulties; and – as often if less evidently – the Lacanian sense of a final and deflating puncturing of all imaginary and symbolic realms.

A number of what appear nodal issues in media education surfaced repeatedly in debate across the sessions, and are worth noting here.

Firstly, considerable emphasis was placed on the implications of changes in media technology and institutions since the 1970s – changes so pervasive that they manage to go relatively unnoticed, even within the practice of media education. A number of strands of change were commented on in particular: the significantly expanded and altered television environment itself; the domestic and pedagogic accessibility of the VCR as a result of the video revolution, bringing film and television in a number of respects much closer together than previously; a new and more active educational role taken by film archives and archivists; and the US domination of film and television not just in the longstanding sense of production but also increasingly in terms of scholarship and educational initiative.

Within the compass of these changes, quite a lot was said regarding the mixed legacy of what was referred to in shorthand during the

conference simply as '70s theory'. A number of participants suggested that media studies needs to reconsider its public image and relationship with other fields, as a consequence of taking a more measured view of the achievements and shortcomings of such theoretical work. For other participants, continuing loyalty to the traditions and achievements of such work is justifiable, not least because film theory of the 1970s and 1980s now represents an important historical landmark of left-intellectual cultural work, given what one speaker referred to elliptically as 'the collapse of 1917'. The more cautionary view was also expressed, however, that media studies should beware of using merely a convenient stereotype of '1970s theory' as a *bad object*, or sacrificial symbol of accepted intellectual error. Predictably, the argument over theory also spilled over into more concrete commentary, for example when the (all-white) participants at Lola Young's workshop on *Looking for Langston* seemed to divide over whether the output of the British black workshops during the 1980s represented distinct and emergent intellectual-political formation, or simply a notable and accomplished derivation from Godard.

In a broader look at mainstream media practice, the issue of relations between media studies and the film and television industries was often raised – especially the structural oddity of energetic left critique of television by students coexisting with their equally fervent aspiration to work for the Great Satan as soon as possible after graduation. Equally problematic was the extent to which it is necessary to gain experience of production in order to understand the notion of creative or productive *choice* which must underlie concepts of filmic or televisual style – an issue which cuts to the core of the question in media studies of the relationship between elements of theory and elements of practice. But studies in politics, argued one participant, aren't expected to produce

politicians, so why should a gap between media studies and the media industry, or between media theory and vocational training, be seen as so problematic? The debate seems guaranteed a place at future meetings.

More generally, the implications for media studies of the current restructuring of British education were assessed, especially in a series of useful discussions of the school and further education sectors. Developing the point that there is no specialized provision for media education in the National Curriculum, some participants argued that there is a need to think afresh about how media-based work can best be accomplished in such subjects as English and History. In the workshops, too, useful attention was given to 'A' Level media studies, as well as to the challenge and difficulties of writing an introductory guidebook in the field, *Teach Yourself Cinema*. Given a recent policy shift on the part of funding bodies towards MA funding – and with the present forty-three UK MAs in the field likely soon to be joined by many more – some of the many problems of student funding in higher education were tackled; and following a presentation by John O. Thompson on aspects of the BFI's proposed MA (notably the bursary funding of nine students from September 1992), the issues of centralization versus regionalism, and broad education versus deep, were explored.

Finally, given the conference's theme of the changing identity of media studies into the 1990s, it is worth noting how troubled some participants were by what was at least once referred to as the F*** word ('film'). Alongside its obvious interest in relation to recent achievements in archive work – as well as in the context of video screenings of films even in classes on the *difference* between film and video – 'film' draws attention to a more significant question: How far has film's loss of its earlier centrality within media studies been precipitated by the fact that film features less centrally in the 1990s media

environment, and how far is this change the result of a concern in film studies with auteurs and a canon of works, which arguably stands in the way of other emphases which link media studies increasingly with contemporary cultural studies? Even dealing with this question of the declining educational status of film must have appeared a luxury to one participant, though, who pointed out that having come to the conference with a research interest in radio he was disappointed to discover that virtually nobody mentioned radio at all.

Although the sessions which made up this conference could hardly be said to have constituted a dramatic preview of initiatives for the 1990s (especially given that university film and media departments – as opposed to polytechnic/new university departments – were so damagingly under-represented), many of the individual presentations were challenging and originally presented.

But it would have been unwise, even so, for anyone to take away too rosy a picture of the field. The conference ended with AMFIT's sparsely attended second AGM, co-ordinated by departing chairperson Phillip Drummond (the small attendance seemingly a sign of declining membership, almost halved since 1989). Central to its agenda, the meeting considered possibilities for the coming year. Valuably for the relationship between further education and higher education, next year's conference may well join AMFIT organizationally with AME (the Association for Media Education) and with ACS (the Association for Cultural Studies). But, given the scale of change likely at all levels of education over the next five years, as well as the sorts of upheaval anticipated in the media industries and institutions themselves, it seems reasonable to ask: is a conference initiative alone (sensible as AMFIT's undoubtedly is) really *enough* for a 'return of the real' in media education in the 1990s?

Alan Durant

The 14th Créteil International Women's Film Festival, 10–20 April 1992

The female gaze has for a long time now been a talking point in debates around women's cinema. Logically one would expect a women's film festival such as Créteil, to be the place for exploring (and exploding?) such questions. If posters and postcards are anything to go by, it becomes clear from this year's two official representations, that Créteil wants to engage with the concept of looking and the female gaze. As a festival whose main object is to be a showcase for the films of women directors, imagining this gaze as active, directed and instrumental when involved in artistic practice is not the problem. This is illustrated by the festival postcard, a collection of vivid and expressive portraits of some of the contributing directors, by photographer Valérie Caillon. The diversity of looks confronting us in this collage, also challenges the unity and homogeneity implied by the convenient, but problematic label 'women's cinema'.

A fuller conception of the gaze, however, would surely include the aspect of the spectator. Were we in this context to take the festival poster, created by a male designer, as Créteil's second and more conspicuous visual statement, then it becomes clear that the focus has shifted from the dialectic of women looking, to the familiar position of looking at women, that is: 'woman' as image, in which the gaze inscribed is male. How else to explain the ornamental display of scattered, fragmented, not to say sliced and mirrored 'eye-shots' of actresses (all of them young, beautiful, decoratively made-up) on view here. One possible reason why such inconsistencies pass unnoticed, could be due to the absence of an ideological framework (including any but the most liberally conceived versions of feminism) motivating Créteil as a whole; something which also frustrates any attempt to place the festival in a larger theoretical

environment, and how far is this change the result of a concern in film studies with auteurs and a canon of works, which arguably stands in the way of other emphases which link media studies increasingly with contemporary cultural studies? Even dealing with this question of the declining educational status of film must have appeared a luxury to one participant, though, who pointed out that having come to the conference with a research interest in radio he was disappointed to discover that virtually nobody mentioned radio at all.

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context. One is reminded here of the fact that Laura Mulvey's seminal and today much debated essay 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema', first published in *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 3 (1975), is yet to be published in French. The first translation into French will be published in *20 ans de théories féministes du cinéma* edited by Bérénice Reynaud and Ginette Vincendeau (Editions du cerf, 1993).

Spanning eleven days, and based at Créteil's Maison des Arts, in the suburbs of Paris, 1992's 'Festival International de Films de Femmes' featured some twenty-six features and thirty shorts in competition. Outside of competition, as well as the special sections, space was given to work on video from the collections of the Centre Simone De Beauvoir and the Québec based filmmakers Vidéo Femmes, both of which illustrated the growing flexibility of the medium, especially when used for short films.

Regarding short films, the 'Enthousiasmes et découvertes' (Enthusiasms and Discoveries) section this year was dedicated to Germaine Dulac, dubbed 'first feminist of the avant garde' by Sandy Flitterman-Lewis in *To Desire Differently: Feminism and French Cinema* (University of Illinois Press, 1990). As well as the better known films *La Souriante Madame Beudet* (1923) and *La Coquille et le Clergyman* (1927), three other shorts were chosen – *Thèmes et Variations* (1928), *Arabesques* (1928), and *Disque 957* (1929) – which explored in more detail Dulac's concept of 'visual music'. The fascination such a section should offer was tempered by the lack of either 'enthusiasm' or 'discovery'; for not only had Créteil previously 'done' Dulac in one of its early festivals, this repetition offered no new material.

Despite her 1920s aesthetics, the immortality of Dulac's films – particularly her attempt at representing female subjectivity in *La Souriante Madame Beudet* – was apparent through the 'Beudet-like' quality of a short

in competition entitled *Scènes de ménage* (Claire Simon, 1991). Originally made for and already broadcast on Canal Plus (the most popular of France's pay channels), *Scènes de ménage* consisted of ten extracts from the daily routine of a housewife (played with much zeal by Miou-Miou). Each sketch was accompanied by an appropriate fantasy such as 'I'm going to kill him', as she washes the floor, or 'he's got a mistress' as she irons, pumping steam to the rhythms of the imagined adultery.

This year's main section outside films in competition: 'Les Européennes', was intended as a mapping of the rapidly changing contours of Europe, along with their effect on the individual careers of women directors. The resulting emphasis (true to Créteil's auteurist bias) tended to be on individual careers, as became evident during the concurring discussions and debates. These were not always as productive as one might have hoped, the frame of reference usually being the single oeuvre of the director in question, of which frequently only the film screened would be familiar to the audience.

Wildly contrasting differences of opinion were revealed, however, once a film was placed in context, as was the case with Radha Bharadwaj's US coproduction *Closet Land* (1990) produced with the support of Amnesty International. The ensuing controversy arose not so much from the film's topic of torture and mental and physical abuse, as from its aesthetics, a testimony one feels of Bharadwaj's background in advertising. The idea of letting a single set piece (a futuristic design of neoclassical columns and chequered floors), form the background of the increasingly complex relationship between a male interrogator (Alan Rickman) and his female victim, (Madeleine Stove) was surely meant to raise the issue of torture from a nationally specific to a universal issue. The debate centred firstly on whether or not the well-

groomed appearance of the protagonists, coupled with the glossy abstraction of the mise-en-scene and the absence of a single drop of blood, actually undermined the worthy intentions. Secondly the question was raised as to whether such aestheticism did not, in fact, place itself in the service of what it tried to condemn, creating fascination instead of repulsion. In addition, one was yet again forced to ask whose gaze was inscribed by the look of the camera, when investigating violence against women in mainstream cinema, even when the director is a woman.

It is of interest here to recall the words of Jeanne Labrune, one of the few better-known French women directors who is a declared feminist, that in her opinion the spirit is androgynous and that a specifically feminine discourse does not exist. Labrune's film *De Sable et de sang* (1988) which appeared under the European section, might be offered as proof to this point as it explores the machismo and goriness of bull-fighting and slaughterhouses. Yet, maybe precisely because of the choice of subject and the 'unfeminine' way of handling it, the violence is rendered almost unbearably real, though for once it is not directed against women. Labrune manages to come across with an unmistakably clear statement on masculinity and power, whilst retaining a visually spectacular film.

This year's 'Auto-portrait' was presented by the French actress Bernadette Lafont. It was introduced with *Les Mistons* (François Truffaut, 1957) and *Les Stances à Sophie* (Moshe Mizrahi, 1971). Whilst the former was one of the films which inaugurated the 'New Wave', and which now enjoys the status of a classic of French cinema, the latter, despite its adaptation from a novel by Christiane Rochefort, has rarely been shown since its release. *Les Stances à Sophie* charts Sophie (Lafont's) progress from outcast hippy, to bourgeois housewife, to a more independent and once again rebellious position, helped by her friend Julia (Bulle

Ogier, who presented her own 'auto-portrait' in 1986). Hiding amidst its typically chaotic seventies aesthetics and often anarchic dialogue, one finds a more serious exploration of female bonding which, along with Lafont's energetic performance, sustains the interest and flavours the emotional pull.

Among those directors returning to Créteil was Léa Pool with her third feature *La Demoiselle sauvage* (1991). Whilst her last film *Anne Trister* (1985) offered us in its opening the white other-worldliness of the desert, which was then revisited throughout the film in a series of vast spaces, *La Demoiselle sauvage* is equally ethereal in its setting in a void-like drained reservoir. Yet it is considerably less successful in mixing this landscape with its exploration of the female psyche. The savage and psychotic 'demoiselle' of the title is stubbornly closed to the spectator, who is consequently forced to identify with the gaze of the male engineer who finds and nurtures her. Once again the landscape seems to represent an internal state, yet whilst the desert in *Anne Trister* was a shared space where the two women could meet, the reservoir in *La Demoiselle sauvage* offers little refuge to the 'demoiselle'. Her inability to live either within society (with the engineer) or outside of it (in the reservoir) leads her to a self-destructive end.

Despite its envisaged diversity, the heterogeneity of 'women's cinema' as presented at Créteil this year was largely white, European and heterosexual, even when taking the intentional focus on Europe into consideration. In paraphrasing Teresa De Lauretis one is tempted to conclude that while some women may be invisible (or too visible) to men in their society, there are also women who are invisible to other women, in our society.

Rendering the 'other' visible can perhaps be seen as the project of Monika Treut, whose filmography includes *Seduction – the Cruel Woman* (1985) and *The Virgin Machine*

(1988), the latter being a feminine picaresque tale which explores the limits of romantic love in a lesbian context. This year's entry in competition, *My Father is Coming* (1991), described by Treut as a 'pansexual comedy', can be characterized as *Bagdad Café* (1987) in reverse, where the initially disapproving Bavarian father soon proves all too adaptable to New York 'free society'. He finds success as an actor in commercials, and if not true love, then at least sexual fulfilment in the arms of a New Age pornographic artiste. The heroine, his bemused daughter, is within this structure permitted a true multiple choice, where none of the options have to be excluded, as she alternates between a lesbian lover and a submissive male transsexual.

Issues of race and class were given a visually poetic treatment by black American filmmaker Julie Dash, in *Daughters of the Dust* (1991). The result of extensive research into the African heritage, the film presents the traditions of a colony of former slaves on the isolated Sea Islands off the coast of South Carolina, in the early 1900s. The island people are about to migrate to the North when a boat full of mainland relatives arrives to celebrate, including a photographer who is to record the event. In what would be conventionally labelled, for lack of a better term, a 'feminine aesthetic', Dash lets visual and aural discourses intertwine, always privileging the women characters as they give voice to their hopes and fears of the new and the necessity or impossibility of leaving the old behind. The slow and sensually lingering camera work affords a slightly nostalgic shimmer, to what one imagines must have been harsh and forbidding circumstances.

More familiar (and familial) themes are the subject of Gillian Armstrong's *The Last Days of 'chez nous'* (1991) which follows a similar pattern to her last film *High Tide* (1987), winner of the Jury prize in 1988. Once again then we are stranded in a drama where the idyll of the family is questioned and continually torn apart. The focus here is

upon two sisters, the emotionally barren Beth (Lisa Harrow), still clinging to a stale and passionless marriage, and the young and energetic Vicki (Kerry Fox), returning from a trip to Europe pregnant, yet transformed. After encouraging Vicki to have an abortion, Beth makes a last attempt to reconcile herself to her father through a trip to the outback, whilst at home Vicki's grief draws Beth's husband, J.P., to her. The film's mixture of the quotidian with the melodramatic (so many beautiful sunsets, and stormy nights) echoes the more dangerous mixing of bloods implicit in the love story played too close to home, where the loser is also the next of kin. The only peculiarity in this otherwise seamless film is the casting of Bruno Ganz (complete with stripy T-shirt, garlic and 'French' accent) as J.P. the Frenchman!

The three films mentioned above were not awarded prizes, while the Jury Prize went to Danish Susanne Bier's *Freud Leaves Home* (*Freud flyttar hemifrån*, 1991) a film which one feels must have been a popular choice. Predominantly an actor's film, *Freud Leaves Home* gathers together an impressive cast of some of the well-known names from Scandinavian film and theatre, including the grande dame of Danish cinema, Ghita Nørby. It offers a warm and sympathetic portrait of erupting chaos and emotional disintegration in a Jewish family, as the mother is hospitalized and discovered to be dying of cancer while in the midst of planning her fiftieth birthday party. The Freud of the title refers to the youngest daughter, a psychology student, still living at home and still a virgin with newly fitted braces on her teeth. During a few short summer weeks Freud discovers sex, love (including her mother's), life outside the family home and a liberation of sorts.

A similar journey of liberation is followed by the film which won the Public prize *Dream On* (1991), a British production directed by Ellin Hare, Lorna Powell and the

Amber Collective. Set in grim and grey North Shields, *Dream On*, as its title suggests, mixes moments of poetic fantasy (six-foot furry ducks waiting at cashpoints) with the more depressing lives of four women, confronting bulimia nervosa, alcohol and sexual abuse. If one sees *Freud Leaves Home* as a literal enactment of Sigmund Freud's thesis on the liberating aspect of heterosexual love for the formation of female identity, then *Dream On* presents us with the stark reality of marriage and familial relations, no longer liberating, or loving. The emphasis upon collectivity inherent in Amber's structure is echoed in this film, each of the women in turn supporting/being supported by the other, and finding strength through this union.

The disparity between Créteil's Jury choice of heterosexual love (*Freud Leaves Home*) and the Public's choice of solidarity amongst women (*Dream On*), returns us to the contradictions apparent in the attempt to represent a dynamic interaction between women (the postcard) and a male appropriation of this project (the poster); all of which connects with the history of Créteil as a site of struggle. Trying to assess Créteil makes it part of a continuous discourse, creating pleasure or dissent, but always curiosity, and thus ensuring one's annual return.

Cathy Fowler and Lena Nordby

'Console-ing Passions': Television, Video and Feminism, University of Iowa 3-5 April 1992

'Console-ing Passions', a brand-new annual conference on television, video and feminist studies made a promising debut at the University of Iowa over the weekend of 3-5 April 1992. Lauren Rabinovitz, as this year's conference co-ordinator, can be credited with a superbly organized event: from the lengthy breaks that provided ample time for

discussion, to the impressive supply of pastries and coffee that facilitated discussion (a welcome alternative to the oft-empty coffee urn that graced one recent film conference I attended), to the screenings of feminist video art, rare television programming from the archives of the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, and Laura Kipnis's 1990 *Marx: The Video – A Politics of Revolting Bodies*, to the student-driven vans that ferried participants to and from the airport twenty miles away. 'Console-ing Passions' is definitely the most pleasurable conference I have ever attended. (It should be noted that while Rabinovitz served as host to this year's conference, programme planning was undertaken by a committee that also included Julie D'Acci, Jane Feuer, Mary Beth Haralovich and Lynn Spigel.)

Aside from an evening programme of women's experimental videos, there was, somewhat strangely, only one conference panel devoted to video as a topic of analysis. Titled 'Activist Women', this panel featured a paper on a group of 1989 pro-choice videos produced by women's collectives, and an advance screening and discussion of their first video produced for public access television by a feminist collective from Gainesville, Florida. The collective included a group of Ph.D. students from the University of Florida and what they referred to as 'women from the community' who were not present at the conference. Last year, in a *Screen* article on feminism and media pedagogy, Charlotte Brunsdon referred to 'that generalized other to feminism, the housewife'. Now, in 1992, the legendary 'housewife' of British cultural studies appears to have been replaced, at least in the United States, by the more multiculturally euphemistic 'woman in the community'.

The relationship between academic feminists and 'regular' or 'real' women was dealt with at length in a paper given by Brunsdon at a panel devoted to 'Issues in

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The relationship between academic feminists and 'regular' or 'real' women was dealt with at length in a paper given by Brunsdon at a panel devoted to 'Issues in

Feminist Criticism'. Brunsdon talked about three relationships the feminist media/cultural critic has commonly constructed between herself and her 'other', 'the ordinary woman'. The first of these relationships, which Brunsdon termed 'transparent', is more characteristic of earlier phases of feminist scholarship – it is uncomplicated and inclusive, all women are sisters, there is no 'other', and the pronoun of choice is 'we'. This is the most suspect position a feminist critic could take nowadays and probably quite dangerous to the health of her academic career. Brunsdon calls the second relationship 'hegemonic' as it is the most widely evidenced in feminist criticism. It fluctuates between inclusiveness and exclusiveness, but for the most part sets up a distinction between feminists and non-feminists (or 'ordinary women') and is exemplified in such work as Tania Modleski's *Loving with a Vengeance* (Shoe String, 1982) and Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance* (University of North Carolina Press, 1984). The third relationship, which Brunsdon calls 'fragmented', is currently 'the most chic and fashionable' and is ruled over by the pronoun 'I'. This sort of feminist positioning in which the feminist can speak about no one but herself belongs to what Nancy K. Miller has referred to in *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Autobiographical Acts* (Routledge, 1991) as the 'proliferation of autobiographical criticism' and the 'rhetorics of representativity' that emerged as major phenomena in feminist writing during the 1980s. Brunsdon pointed out the danger of solipsism inherent to this third position and warned that its repudiation of earlier feminism (the 'transparent' and 'hegemonic' positions) in fact mirrors the 'hegemonic' repudiation of (non-feminist) 'women'. I would add that the 'fragmented' relationship also reflects a desire to occupy an ideologically unblemished position. This desire is a narcissistic fantasy and an impossibility. I think the time has come to

stop worrying over the 'PC' status we might or might not enjoy with our colleagues, and instead concentrate on what we are really trying to say in our work.

Brunsdon's paper had a major impact at this conference. On more than several occasions those presenting papers referred to her categories and 'admitted' to being either 'transparent' or 'hegemonic' (more often 'transparent'). Lynn Spigel began her presentation by exclaiming, 'Oh no, I think I'm "transparent"! Maybe "hegemonic" . . . I thought "fragmented" would be privileged; I was really happy when it wasn't.' I heard no one speak up for the 'fragmented' position, leading me to wonder if perhaps Brunsdon's paper provided a context in which people could openly repudiate what Elspeth Probyn called during one session 'poststructural postfeminism'. I think that problems around issues such as 'political correctness' and 'rules of order' in feminist criticism would be one important area of discussion for next year's conference.

Another set of questions arose around the issue of choosing television programmes for analysis. Although it cannot be said that a feminist television canon materialized at this conference, the spectrum of television shows addressed was rather narrow (popular shows included *LA Law*, *Designing Women*, *Northern Exposure*, and *Oprah!*). Television programmes mainly served either as material for close readings or as context for consideration of issues such as body image and weight, masculinity, fandom, AIDS, and the big three – identity (lesbian and 'generic'), consumption and reception. Someone asked if these choices might be directing other feminist television critics about what to watch, and more implicitly, what to ignore, and suggested the possibility that the 'seductive politics of liberal feminist shows' were actually setting the parameters of feminist media criticism. Unfortunately, this last point generated no further discussion. Constance Penley maintained that

'liberal feminist' shows get critiqued not only because they enjoy both 'enormous public reception' and 'enormous public discourse', but also because they document the entry of feminism into the public sphere. This may be so, but it is also important that feminist television criticism extend beyond the parameters of 'women's programmes', and programmes with a so-called feminist sensibility. There needs to be feminist work done on the recent shifts and changes in *categories* of television programming (for example, the massive increase in *Oprah!*-style talk shows or the advent and rapid growth of exploitation, tabloid, and home-video shows) and on the ways in which these trends might link up with wider political and cultural developments. For instance, what might phone-in talk shows, home-video programmes and the overwhelming tide of television polls on every subject imaginable have to do with the decline of voting in the US, concepts of national identity and/or notions of 'community' and consensus?

It is disappointing and disheartening when race makes an appearance in critical work merely as a mandatory aside or as a guarantee against being branded politically incorrect; but, as a major structural element of televisual representation, race deserves more attention than it got at this conference. For instance, considering the plethora of sitcoms with all black, or nearly all black, casts enjoying prime-time popularity on post-Cosby television, I am stymied by the fact that *Julia* (1968–71) was the only sitcom providing context for analysis of intersecting constructions of black identity and gender on television.

There were, however, a large number of very interesting papers presented. Just a few of these were Lauren Rabinovitz's 'Ms-representations: television feminism and its "other" in *Designing Women*' in which race was represented in her discussion of feminism's 'other' as it is embodied by the ultra-feminine woman, the black man, and

sometimes the lesbian woman; Sandy Flitterman-Lewis's 'Soap operas, sporting events, and the politics of popular imagination' and Gloria-Jean Masciarotte's '“Women should be obscene and not heard”: the explicit voice and the social production of knowledge', both of which theorized the Clarence Thomas/Anita Hill Senate hearings; Robyn Wiegman's paper on constructions of masculinity in television's 'Gulf War' coverage and the roles the family, 'neutral' technology, and melodrama played in those constructions; M. Alison Kibler's discussion of gendered audience construction in the context of televisual stand-up comedy; and Andrea Slane's theories of pre-adolescent identification with *Jem* (1986–8), a cartoon aimed at young girls. There was also a very timely paper given by Hilary Radner on prime-time maternity outside the nuclear family that just preceded the Dan Quayle-inspired media fracas over *Murphy Brown* (after the 18 May 1992 episode in which she went into labour), and the intensification of media interest in 'family values'.

Using her women's studies students as a sort of ethnographic resource, Lynn Spigel gave an extremely interesting paper about the construction of popular memory and the role of television in legitimating the present as progressive and 'postfeminist'. Beginning with the observation that a huge number of students insist on writing about the ever improving roles of women every year, Spigel explained how her students used shows 'about' the 1950s (whether they be circa *Ozzie and Harriett* [1952–66] or circa *Laverne and Shirley* [1976–83]) as historical evidence for their claim that feminism has done its job and that things are great for women now. That popular memory is an ideological mechanism was made clear by the fact that Spigel's students simultaneously asserted that television was actually bad historical evidence and used it as support for their claims about feminism. Slavoj Žižek has exemplified this 'retroactive positing of conditions' by

showing how the assassination of John F. Kennedy, retroactively constructed as a national trauma, allows one to believe something like 'if Kennedy hadn't been assassinated we wouldn't be cynical and apathetic and our government wouldn't be corrupt'. In the case of Spigel's postfeminist students, it is not a lacking present that is being constructed, but rather a lacking past. Spigel ended her talk by abruptly asserting that popular memory has 'use value' in an alienating world, that it is a positive, self-sustaining fiction. When Sasha Torres asked about the ideological import of this sort of historicizing, Spigel responded that she was looking for an affirmative function for popular memory. One can't help but be reminded of Budd et al's comments in their 1990 essay, 'The affirmative character of US cultural studies', (*Critical Studies and Mass Communication*, vol. 7, no. 2 [1990], pp. 169–84), and wonder about the fear of appearing too negative in a post-Adorno critical world. Dicta such as 'be positive, not negative' that hold sway in US cultural studies have an uncanny way of undermining the strength of an argument and, in my opinion, should be avoided.

Next year's conference will be held in Los Angeles at the University of Southern California. 1993's call for papers is more diverse than 1992's and incorporates areas of analysis presented at this year's conference in its suggestions, indicating that participation has everything to do with the continued growth and vigour of the conference. At this point there is every indication that *Console-ing Passions* will not only continue long into the future, but may well become the most exciting and interesting venue for live television and popular culture criticism, feminist or otherwise, in the United States.

Bethany Ogdon

Society for Cinema Studies conference, Pittsburgh, 30 April–3 May 1992

Following the focus on multiculturalism in last year's SCS conference, the theme this year was similar but broader: 'Oppression, Silencing and the Production of Diverse Voices'. The continued attention to minorities within the SCS community has begun to pay dividends, at least in terms of the large number of panels and screenings devoted to questions of race and ethnicity, and gay and lesbian cinema. A somewhat fractious plenary session, however, revealed that many scholars working within these fields remain unconvinced that real progress has been made. One of the most prominent concerns voiced at this session was that the broader attention to gay cinema and non-western cinema is jammed at the level of topical interest. There is little sense that these new fields of study are having an impact on the way in which fundamental questions in film and media studies are conceived, in the way that, for example, feminism redefined questions of pleasure and identification. Ella Shohat complained of the persistence of a singular Film History, which should give way to diverse and multiple film histories. It is certainly true that the level of historiographical sophistication within film studies is – on the whole – lamentably low. The major exception to this – early film history – was virtually absent from the conference, a sign perhaps of the fact that it has now created its own institutions, including conferences. As film and media studies grows, it may be that debate at the large, centralized conferences such as SCS will be broader (embracing a wider range of topics) but less intense, while the more ground-breaking debate occurs at smaller, more specialized conferences, such as those organized over the last couple of years by the early film studies and cultural studies communities respectively. Indeed, to this observer, this has been precisely the

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trajectory of SCS over the last half-decade.

The increase in diversity of types of cinema and media addressed was not entirely matched by a similar diversity in theoretical approach. Certainly the absolute ascendancy of the Althusserian–Lacanian paradigm – if it ever existed – has ended, but it has been replaced as much by an atheoretical sentiment as by a debate among new theories. In spite of the relative variety of theoretical approaches now apparent in film studies, each theory tends to avoid debate with the alternatives. Intriguing material was presented which drew on phenomenology, ethology, cognitive theories of emotion, quantitative social science, but the dialogue between such innovations and theoretical/methodological approaches more established within film studies was very limited. Symptomatic of this was the (heavily-attended) panel entitled ‘What is the Future of Psychoanalysis in Film Studies?’ Given the title of the panel, the parameters of the debate were set rather narrowly, excluding any critique of psychoanalysis from the outside. (Surely this would have been the appropriate place for Carl Plantinga’s paper, which both developed and criticized Noël Carroll’s cognitive explanation of ‘the power of movies’, if debate at the metatheoretical level was to be engendered. Instead, Plantinga’s paper was programmed with, and obscured by, an inflammatory but empty attack on ‘political correctness’ in film studies – more of which later.) Nevertheless, papers ranged from the very particular (a study of *Paris is Burning* [1990] by Ilsa Bick, a practising analyst) to the very general (an excoriating commentary on the methodology of psychoanalytic film theory and criticism by Gaylyn Studlar). Studlar’s paper was the most substantial from a theoretical point of view, focusing on the reliance on authority as a rhetorical device (‘As Lacan has shown . . .’) within psychoanalytic film studies, and, following on from this, the lack of attention paid to psychoanalysis as an ongoing clinical

practice. The response to such arguments proved vigorous, with considerable scepticism expressed concerning the virtues of dialogue with clinicians. Noting that the paper on *Paris is Burning* failed to mention that the film was about a part of the gay community, a gay audience member wondered what impact work on gay cinema was to have on the presuppositions of psychoanalytic film theory – echoing the concern mentioned above, that for all the space given to minority issues, they remain compartmentalized. My own feeling was that Studlar’s challenge did not follow its own logic through: why question the prominent role of authority in the use of psychoanalysis in film studies, when that feature stems in large part from the methodology of psychoanalysis itself? Psychoanalysis in film remains regrettably parochial, to the degree that it does not admit debate regarding its foundations and methodology. It may not be unique in this, but it is surely the most visible because it remains the dominant theory within the SCS community. The size and heat (if not the light) of the debate established this if nothing else. Judged by David Rodowick’s flippant, yet depressingly smug, remark – to the effect that his book on psychoanalysis and film is selling very nicely – the future of psychoanalysis in film studies seems assured, though perhaps not for the right reasons.

Elsewhere in the domain of theory, one of the most debated concepts was that elusive but persistent troublemaker, the Spectator. Following the attention given to the concept in various theories over the last fifteen years, a schism seems to have opened up with respect to what theory can really contribute to this debate. On the one hand, there were those who suggested that theory should be abandoned in favour of a form of personal testimony or diary (such as ‘Identification and autobiography, or, *Charlie’s Angels* and us’, by Carrie Buse and Linda Urban). On the other hand, there were those who saw

this strategy as the moment at which the purely idiosyncratic takes over, and ceases to have general – theoretical – interest. And then there was a remarkable attempt by Leo Charney to square the circle by arguing – if I understood him correctly – for a *theory* of the *unique* spectator. In an elegant but flawed talk on ‘the power of the critic’, Charney argued that in spite of the various wellknown critical revolutions of recent years, the pernicious habit of generalizing continues, in which the irreducibility of the individual spectator’s response is crushed by the ruthless mechanisms of theory, whether New Critical or Derridean. Since it is in the nature of theory to make generalizations, one can only turn to the diary as an alternative form of writing if one is interested in the uniqueness rather than the typicality of an individual spectator’s response. It is surely incoherent to call for a theory which not only acknowledges the actual uniqueness of individual viewings, but tries to generalize about such unique occurrences. In other words, the paper made for good melodrama but poor theory.

One event awaited with a kind of grim fascination was a paper to be given by Lawrence Jarvik, a representative of the neo-conservative Heritage Foundation, on ‘political correctness’ in film studies. This, however, turned out to be a damp squib, due to the complete ignorance of the speaker on the subject of film studies, masked only by some tired platitudes concerning reformist and revolutionary attitudes to social change. The libertarian muse failed Mr Jarvik after a mere twelve minutes – a unique accomplishment in the annals of SCS – frustrating those audience members spoiling for a fight. Far more interesting, on the political level, were two documents which challenged the prevailing, broadly poststructural assumptions of the field as a whole. First, a paper by Alex Juhasz on AIDS awareness videos, reported that – against the researcher’s own preconceptions –

the most effective rhetorical strategies for such work were the traditional aesthetics of realism and identification, not those of alienation. Second, in response to the verdict in the Rodney King case – which was delivered the night before the conference began – a petition was circulated which deplored the verdict, arguing that it was facilitated by a technique of microanalysis (freeze-framing, endless rerunning of portions of the tape backwards and forwards at various speeds) which obscured the obvious brutality of the incident. In other words, sometimes we need to be able to say that one reading of an image is *true*er than another; indeed, some readings are lies. So far as I could tell, however, the ironies and questions thrown up by this document went largely unnoticed or unheeded by the SCS community.

Murray Smith

Spectating as SCS

The theme for the May 1992 Society for Cinema Studies Conference was ‘Oppression, Silencing and the Production of Diverse Voices’. The weekend certainly produced diverse voices, with panels running the gamut from ‘National Cinema/National Identity’ to ‘Constructing Masculinity’ to ‘Film Music and Film Form’, but it proved more difficult to address questions of oppression and silencing. Echoing last year’s conference on multiculturalism, SCS members continued to ponder the relationship of film and television studies to other academic discourses, to pedagogy and to politics. President-elect Virginia Wright Wexman specified the move of film studies toward cultural studies as a central issue for SCS, and several participants discussed the importance of redefining what constitutes knowledge in the field, particularly along the lines of race, class and gender.

this strategy as the moment at which the purely idiosyncratic takes over, and ceases to have general – theoretical – interest. And then there was a remarkable attempt by Leo Charney to square the circle by arguing – if I understood him correctly – for a *theory* of the *unique* spectator. In an elegant but flawed talk on ‘the power of the critic’, Charney argued that in spite of the various wellknown critical revolutions of recent years, the pernicious habit of generalizing continues, in which the irreducibility of the individual spectator’s response is crushed by the ruthless mechanisms of theory, whether New Critical or Derridean. Since it is in the nature of theory to make generalizations, one can only turn to the diary as an alternative form of writing if one is interested in the uniqueness rather than the typicality of an individual spectator’s response. It is surely incoherent to call for a theory which not only acknowledges the actual uniqueness of individual viewings, but tries to generalize about such unique occurrences. In other words, the paper made for good melodrama but poor theory.

One event awaited with a kind of grim fascination was a paper to be given by Lawrence Jarvik, a representative of the neo-conservative Heritage Foundation, on ‘political correctness’ in film studies. This, however, turned out to be a damp squib, due to the complete ignorance of the speaker on the subject of film studies, masked only by some tired platitudes concerning reformist and revolutionary attitudes to social change. The libertarian muse failed Mr Jarvik after a mere twelve minutes – a unique accomplishment in the annals of SCS – frustrating those audience members spoiling for a fight. Far more interesting, on the political level, were two documents which challenged the prevailing, broadly poststructural assumptions of the field as a whole. First, a paper by Alex Juhasz on AIDS awareness videos, reported that – against the researcher’s own preconceptions –

the most effective rhetorical strategies for such work were the traditional aesthetics of realism and identification, not those of alienation. Second, in response to the verdict in the Rodney King case – which was delivered the night before the conference began – a petition was circulated which deplored the verdict, arguing that it was facilitated by a technique of microanalysis (freeze-framing, endless rerunning of portions of the tape backwards and forwards at various speeds) which obscured the obvious brutality of the incident. In other words, sometimes we need to be able to say that one reading of an image is *true*er than another; indeed, some readings are lies. So far as I could tell, however, the ironies and questions thrown up by this document went largely unnoticed or unheeded by the SCS community.

Murray Smith

Spectating as SCS

The theme for the May 1992 Society for Cinema Studies Conference was ‘Oppression, Silencing and the Production of Diverse Voices’. The weekend certainly produced diverse voices, with panels running the gamut from ‘National Cinema/National Identity’ to ‘Constructing Masculinity’ to ‘Film Music and Film Form’, but it proved more difficult to address questions of oppression and silencing. Echoing last year’s conference on multiculturalism, SCS members continued to ponder the relationship of film and television studies to other academic discourses, to pedagogy and to politics. President-elect Virginia Wright Wexman specified the move of film studies toward cultural studies as a central issue for SCS, and several participants discussed the importance of redefining what constitutes knowledge in the field, particularly along the lines of race, class and gender.

Many of these now familiar concerns were played out in microcosm in the debates which took place around the problematic of the spectator. For example, the panel 'This Particular Spectator: Rereading Theories of Spectatorship' attempted to complicate film theory's model of the ideal, pre-existing spectator by introducing the insights of both personal experience and cultural studies. After Edward O'Neill's intricately woven defence of the panel's theoretical underpinnings, David Pendleton offered a concrete and lyrical enactment of these ideas. His 'My mother, the cinema' was a rich and pseudo-autobiographical performance of his own spectatorial experience of the cinema and was populated by the voices of Proust, Barthes, Sedgwick, Pasolini and Pendleton's own mother. Pendleton's style literalized the concerns of the panel as it addressed the triangulation of theory, fiction and experience, yet, as one audience member suggested, such playfulness can run the risk of appearing apolitical. Those attending the panel seemed to agree that what was required was a nuanced analysis of spectatorial experience which refused to slide into a celebration of pure difference.

Several other papers provided, in diverse ways, just such textured readings of the spectator. In 'Camping under western stars: Joan Crawford's role in *Johnny Guitar*', Pamela Robertson challenged traditional interpretations of the film by examining how lesbian and camp readings provide both analytic tools and 'a source of potential pleasure for female spectators'. Her analysis complicated our understanding of camp's address by arguing for the possibility of 'both a feminist reading of camp and a reading of what may be feminist camp'. Constance Balides employed a careful balance of the theoretical and the historical in order to trace the positioning of DeMille's spectators given the specificities of class and gender. Balides linked DeMille's use of visual space in cinema to strategies of consumer advertising

(like the display window) which were prevalent at the time. She went on to argue that such an understanding of cinematic space allows us the move beyond Mulvey's polarization of spectacle and narrative by providing a model in which the two become joined. Finally, Balides explored how these scenarios of commodity culture and upward mobility produced specific constraints for women as both spectators and consumers.

Marianne Conroy likewise turned to a historically specific analysis of consumer culture in order to explore the intersections of taste, class, gender and spectatorship in Sirk's *Imitation of Life*. By concentrating on the gap between taste class and economic class, Conroy analysed the way the film employed notions of the 'middlebrow' to signify 'a declassé and specifically feminine mode of cultural consumption'. She also insisted that an exploration of the middlebrow is still crucial today because it can expose how our own categories of analysis are caught up in capitalist formations of taste and value. She then urged the audience to think through more carefully how we *are* the middlebrow, linking our positions as theorists of spectatorship to our own spectatorial roles. Her cautions about rethinking taste and value seemed well-founded given the low attendance at many of the panels which focused on class. Judging from the response to panels on pornography and cybersex, the spectators at SCS seemed more interested in hot and sexy topics. (I, of course, was at those panels too.) In addition, the plenary also drew a large audience.

In 'Sprinkle, Sprinkle Little Star: the permutations of a porn star image', Linda Williams, Chuck Kleinhans and Chris Straayer examined the ways in which performance artist/porn star Annie Sprinkle destabilizes the notion of a 'normal' sexuality by exposing its constructed nature. Though the panel argued that such an exposure could lead to a rethinking of the economy of desire, the papers sometimes felt

uncomfortably close to an uncritical fandom. Still, at panel's end, Straayer pointed out that, although the panel focused on the artist's own understanding of her strategies, Sprinkle's ideology of sex could profit from a Foucauldian critique.

The panel on virtual reality dealt with another topic prone to produce fandoms, but its participants presented a balanced examination of its potential pros and cons. Working, respectively, from analyses of history and trade discourse, William Boddy and Claudia Springer speculated on the role virtual reality technologies might play in shaping gender identities, while Simon Penny delivered a lively performance challenging the popular notion that virtual reality divorces mind from body. Rather, he argued that, given our historically specific cultural conceptions about bodies and vision, virtual reality will most likely reinforce the mind/body dualisms of western culture. The panel seemed indicative of one of its central claims: that, in its current state, the discourses surrounding virtual reality are often more developed than the technology itself.

The plenary session, 'On Pedagogy and Professionalism: Voices from the Margins', served as the site where many of the concrete concerns about the nature of the field were articulated. Alex Doty got the session off to a good start by questioning what the very purpose of the plenary should be, asking if it was about coalition politics or about consciousness raising. Over the next two hours, it probably served as a bit of both. Ella Shoat then eloquently argued that if multiculturalism is to have any real influence over knowledge production in SCS, it cannot be viewed as a 'slight adjustment'. Rather, it signals a seismic break in the field. Just what

the concrete implications of such a break might be became the focus of the general discussion, as participants offered practical suggestions for increasing the diversity of voices included in SCS. Bill Rothman also urged SCS to rethink its own history and pointed out that the call for papers suggested that only the industry censored ideas. He added that the very policies of the organization have silenced diversity. Perhaps SCS should consider who it constructs as its ideal spectator; such an analysis might point the way to connecting with a wider range of voices.

Another concern was the question of what role SCS might play in political developments outside the organization. The timing of the conference foregrounded the need to take that question seriously, for the conference's most watched event was not even on the programme. Rather, it took place in brief moments throughout the weekend as SCS members rushed back to their hotel rooms to catch the latest television coverage of the riots in LA following the King verdict. In between panels, at receptions and during the plenary, the riots became a central focus of conversation, with the membership finally drafting a petition 'voicing outrage' at the verdict of the trial. The petition was signed by 183 members and distributed with press releases following the conference. During the plenary, Gloria Gibson-Hudson asked the question 'What does racism in America have to do with SCS?' Her response: 'Everything'. Obviously, SCS is still struggling with that reply as it attempts to redefine what counts as knowledge in the field. Hopefully, the struggle will be a productive one.

Tara McPherson

reviews

review:

Donald Crafton, *Emile Cohl, Caricature, and Film*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990, 404pp.

LESLIE FELPERIN SHARMAN

1 Donald Crafton, *Before Mickey: The Animated Film 1898–1928* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1892).

2 Ibid., p. 4.

Donald Crafton's book *Before Mickey*,¹ an early and important academic study of the medium, remains an assiduous work of scholarship that illuminated the dark (and silent) age of animation before Walt Disney's *Steamboat Willie* (1928) swaggered into the limelight. Fifteen or so years ago, like befuddled schoolchildren's awareness of Charlemagne as someone dimly connected with the mediaeval period, those interested in film might have vaguely recollected a cat named Felix that ruled before Mickey's Norman conquest; or at the very best they might have heard of or seen Winsor McCay's *Gertie the Dinosaur* (1914). Before Crafton, only a few journalists in specialist magazines and a handful of academic writers researched the origins and discussed the aesthetics and importance of this neglected branch of animation history – itself seen, as Crafton suggested in the first chapter of *Before Mickey*, as 'a minor branch of the history of cinema'.² The book's most interesting achievement was that Crafton managed to collate not only an impressive quantity of historical research about major figures in this history – Emile Cohl, J. R. Bray, Raoul Barre, and many more – who were little known outside animation enthusiasts' circles; but it also elucidated aspects of the nascent film industry, the techniques of early animation, and the complex relationship between animation and graphic art. Drawing on his background in art history, Crafton laid useful groundwork for a more materialist, intertextual study of animation that in many ways anticipated changes in theoretical praxis that would occur in the study of live-

action film. Most importantly, *Before Mickey* drew attention to and established credibility for the embryonic discipline of animation studies, making it a serious object of academic research, literally no longer, to quote the pejorative colloquial expression, a 'Mickey Mouse subject'.

The discipline is now robust enough to support more detailed studies such as the one at hand, Crafton's *Emile Cohl, Caricature, and Film*, a handsomely produced book with well over three hundred illustrations and costing a hefty fifty pounds that would perhaps have seemed an adventurous publishing venture as little as fifteen years ago, even for the specialized academic market. The growing interest in animation has certainly provided a receptive atmosphere for such a work, but as the book demonstrates, Cohl's eventful life (1857–1938), considering his long and significant career in caricature, would still have been a worthy object of study even if he had never seen an animated film. As in *Before Mickey*, Crafton uses the infrastructure of the scholastic biography to build an edifice contiguous to a range of related issues touched on in the previous book: these include caricature in the late nineteenth century, and aspects of the early film industries in France and the United States – including their managerial structure, technical operations, and the composition of their audiences. Crafton asserts that 'the leitmotif of this study of the life and work of Emile Cohl has been the emphasis on the intertextuality of his work. By necessity, pluralist methods have been utilized in its analysis' (p. 306), and this pluralistic method delivers a range of useful material for historians of art and of film, for social historians, as well as for anyone interested in animation. Considering the nature of Crafton's subject – the polymath Cohl – a more narrowly focused methodology would have been inadequate.

Just as his eighty-one-year life spanned the latter half of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth, so Cohl's career was dependent on two of the more important innovations of each century, lithographic printing and film respectively. Something of a loner, he was an individualist whose singular efforts helped mould both the modern comic strip and cinematic animation into the forms by which we know them now, only to see the artisanal craftsmanship of each develop later into industries based on Fordist techniques of mass production. At the end of his life, embittered by neglect and poverty, he had little time for the animation of the day, and wrote, in his typically florid prose (of which, conveniently for his biographer, he produced a great deal): 'Creator, that's to say, Father of animated cartoons, today I see my offspring returning from America resurfaced, gilded, thanks to the fabulous Dollar, and I am floored by the many reject products that are oversaturating the public'. (p. 200)

One might conjecture that Cohl's dyspeptic stance was also born

of disenchantment with animation's assimilation to the constraints of the peripheral 'short subject', the financial demands of which rendered impractical working methods such as his. It is thus sadly fitting that he should have been marginalized in 'the most marginalized branch of cinema, animation', a position which was 'not a departure for him; [but] his characteristic way of doing things', according to Crafton. (p. 307) Moving in bohemian circles for most of his life, Cohl, like many artists of the period, selfconsciously occupied a place on the fringes of bourgeois society, mocking its manners whilst relying on its riches. Following Louisa E. Jones's study of the clown in nineteenth-century art and literature, Crafton reads Cohl's persistent use of this figure as a form of self-figuration as 'the martyred artist', both slave and satirist of his audience.³

3 Louisa E. Jones, *Sad Clowns and Pale Pierrots: Literature and the Popular Comic Arts in Nineteenth Century France* (Lexington, Kentucky: French Forum, 1984), cited in *Emile Cohl*, pp. 304–6.

The author's discussions of Cohl's caricatures and films tend to support this case, showing the continuity of his art throughout his life. At the age of twenty-one, he came under the wing of André Gill, 'the preeminent caricaturist of France', who had an established reputation for his scathing, politically radical cartoons in the lively satirical press of the 1860s and 1870s. Soon Cohl's drawing developed a personality of its own, its humour often turning on puns and employing a graphic style that often conveyed movement, that was more than ordinarily grotesquely proportioned, and that frequently drew its iconography from puppetry and the theatre. All of this resurfaced in Cohl's films. Immediately before his entry into the film industry, Cohl's graphic art became more concerned with narratives and sequential comic strips than with the single image *portrait-charge* of his early work. A sense of progress through time was thus already a preoccupation of his caricature before his introduction to cinema.

Crafton, however, scrupulously refrains from drawing glib comparisons between the comic strip and the cinema; and in his excellent discursive chapter on 'Graphic humor and early cinema', argues with earlier writers' imprecise comparisons of the two media, particularly the misleading equation of the comic panel and the cinematic 'shot'. Despite his emphasis on the intertextuality of Cohl's oeuvre, and the necessity of 'pluralist methods' in order to discuss it, Crafton remains well aware of the differences between comics and animation – where less cautious critics might have been carried away with homogenizing generalizations. The discrimination demonstrated particularly in this essay is one of the book's greatest strengths.

Crafton seems to allow himself a freer hand when discussing the congruence between the graphic art Cohl produced during his association with the *Incoherents* and the films he made in his later years. The *Incoherents* are in themselves an interesting footnote to the history of art in the 1880s: Cohl seems to have been instrumental

in forming the group, a motley collection of artists and literati whose proto-Dadaist aesthetic programme, if their high-spirited antics could be called that, might be summed up by member Jules Levy's motto: '*Frères, il nous faut rire*', implying a rejection of the Symbolists' dour '*Il nous faut mourir*'. Crafton describes the Incoherents' work as placing 'high value on spontaneous artistic expression. They were nihilists who adamantly refused to adhere to rules or conventions or to temper their creations in order to conform to standards of respectability' (p. 258); and their attraction to grotesque, distorted imagery in many ways anticipated the Surrealist movement. Crafton reads Cohl as continuing their work in his earliest animated films for Gaumont, *Fantasmagorie* (1908) and *Une Drame chez les fantoches* (1908) especially, where figures and shapes transform rapidly into new combinations, showing little evidence of logic or indeed coherence. The interest of the Incoherents in insanity, the primitive, and the naïve and childlike were all to resurface in the anarchic world of Cohl's films, even in the more structured and restrained work based on George MacManus's 'The Newlyweds', a comic strip Cohl worked on for Eclair in the USA (and, incidentally for which the term 'animated cartoons' was coined).

Although almost never acknowledged by name at the time in either the credits or the publicity supporting his films, Cohl's work received worldwide distribution; and as 'the first true animator' (if one discounts the experiments of J. S. Blackton) Cohl's impact on the development of animation was great. He developed several techniques, such as the retracing method, puppet and object animation and the use of movable cutouts, all of which were to be adapted and improved upon by later artists. In *Clair de lune espagnol* (1909) he perfected the 'matte' process whereby a live action and an animated image could be double exposed after careful registration on the same film; and he invented a method for exposing single frames without using the cumbersome crank on the camera. More important than these technical innovations, the aesthetic content of his films was to have far-reaching consequences for the development of the medium: the book's single fault is that it shies away from a more thorough examination of Cohl's impact. His 'Incoherent cinema' was influential in establishing a strain of animation – transformative, surreal, veering towards abstraction – that survives today in the work of such diverse artists as Robert Breer and Suzanne Pitt (and in the same spirit, but with three dimensions, Jan Svankmajer and the Brothers Quay); and it certainly partly inspired animators who immediately succeeded him, like Winsor McCay, Otto Mesmer, and the Fleischers. More specific elements of his work – icons such as the 'Hand of the Artist', the clown figure which he adapted from Blackton, and his fondness for literalized metaphors – have become standard in conventional

animation (see Chuck Jones's classic *Duck Amuck* [1953] or the Daniel Greaves recent Oscar nominee *Manipulations* [1991] for two examples of the 'Hand of the Artist' at work, and practically any Fleischer cartoon for literalized metaphors).

Dying penniless and almost forgotten, Cohl's shade will perhaps be pleased to find due justice paid him by such a capable biographer. It would be even more pleasing for the living to see not only Cohl's unique films made more widely available, but more scholarship in the field of animation studies as sensitive as Crafton's to the problematic nature of its subject.

review:

***Cinémaction*, no. 51, 1989, 256pp. 'Le cinéma d'animation', eds Pascal Vimenet and Michel Roudévitch**

JILL McGREAL

Le Cinéma d'animation is a general survey of animation both historical and contemporary. It is edited by writer Pascal Vimenet and writer/programmer Michel Roudévitch, both of whom contribute several pieces to the volume, *Le Cinéma d'animation*, comprising 256 pages of short essays, is divided into six sections: historical; an international survey; a mixed section on sound, backgrounds and so on; the economics of animation, including chapters on funding, merchandising and training; a separate section on computer animation; and a brief guide to animation organizations and festivals.

The preface by Giannalberto Bendazzi, entitled 'Cent un ans', locates the birth of the animated film in 1888 when according to Bendazzi Emile Reynaud unveiled his animated drawing method for the first time. Bendazzi calls the machine which Reynaud used *théâtre optique*; but according to other sources¹ the machine was called the Praxinoscope and Reynaud's Théâtre Optique actually opened in Paris in 1892. So there is some dispute here.

Bendazzi continues his preface with a threefold distinction between types of contemporary animation production:

- (i) industrial, comprising children's television series and the concomitant merchandising business;
- (ii) commissioned work, including television advertisements and information films;
- (iii) animation by 'auteurs', a relatively new departure and financed for the most part publicly.

¹ Roger Noake, *Animation: A Guide to Animated Film Techniques* (London: Macdonald, 1988); Robert Russett and Cecile Starr, *Experimental Animation* (New York: Da Capo Press/Plenum, 1976).

There are issues here which many will want to dispute, but Bendazzi's purpose in drawing these distinctions is to put aside (i) and (ii) and concentrate the reader's attention on (iii).

Vimenet's preamble 'Libérer les monstres' sets the tone for the volume. He justifies the book's piecemeal approach by reference to animation itself: 'Cette disparité est une richesse, fidèle à l'image de son sujet – puisque la diversité est le maître mot de ce cinéma'. (p. 13) He writes panegyrically about this cinema of dreams, nightmares, obsessions, fantasies, imaginings, ghosts and monsters. This type of approach is common in writings about animation, and while it is true that animation is often dreamlike and grotesque it is not useful to impose these labels wholesale on the entire area of animated filmmaking. Quite apart from the fact that not all animation is 'magical' or 'visionary', this approach hides the differences between the work of animators as dissimilar as, say, David Anderson in the UK and Jan Svankmajer in Czechoslovakia – both of whom, in their own ways, deal with the bizarre. This standard nonanalytic approach, which often identifies animation as a 'different world' or as in Vimenet's preamble 'the dark side of the moon of mainstream cinema', simply confirms attitudes and prejudices about animation's 'difference' or its inaccessibility which in turn forces it further into the ghetto.

Le Cinéma d'animation tackles its subject matter in a multitude of short pieces, some of them only a couple of sides long. The end result is an uneven jumble of information much of which is perfunctory. Works of survey, which this volume is, often suffer from this drawback when the importance of what is mentioned is greater than what is said about it. Less excusable are the serious omissions in the historical section, where there are essays on Emile Reynaud, Emile Cohl, Winsor McCay and Chuck Jones (twelve pages), Disney (three pages) and the prolific Hollywood output of the 1920s and 1930s, but nothing more than a sentence or two on Walther Ruttmann, Hans Richter, Oskar Fischinger, Len Lye, Norman McLaren, Lotte Reiniger, Bertold Bartosch, Ladislav Starevich and those other early pioneers of 'artists', animation to whom the roots of Bendazzi's category (iii) can be clearly traced.

In the contemporary section there is a tantalizing short essay by Louise Carrière on the National Film Board of Canada. Carrière has researched the NFB for a doctoral thesis and it is frustrating to be given only a four-page snippet of her vast knowledge of this organization. Moreover, Carrière's essay contains elements of analysis and insight into the output of the NFB and its political context which are evidence of genuine reflection on national cinema as well as on animated film itself – something almost wholly missing from the rest of the volume. For instance the essays on Hollywood are little more than regurgitated histories and anecdotal information,

neither of which provide any critical perspective on this significant historical era of animated filmmaking.

The section on animation in western Europe is preceded by an essay by Philippe Moins which, at three sides long, is unable to encompass the real diversity of production styles and techniques. Instead Moins identifies Raymond Krumme (Germany) and Paul Driessen (Netherlands) as of particular significance and, in Britain, he picks out the Quays, the Aardman Studio, TV Cartoons and Channel Four as worthy of more than a passing reference. Other animators (and in Britain alone when Moins was writing there were three hundred studios at work) are referred to as 'tous les "petits maîtres", habiles techniciens professionnels . . .', a catchall category which hardly does justice to the many great animators working in western Europe in the eighties.

Elsewhere in the contemporary survey section there are three sides on British animation, two of which are on Alison de Vere; a paragraph on the great Czech animator, Jan Svankmajer, five sides on Yuri Norstein and twenty-three sides on France. This latter chapter contains essays on Alexander Alexeieff (who should surely have been in the historical section), Walerian Borowczyk and Jan Lenica as well as more obviously French animators such as Paul Grimault and René Laloux. Such is national pride! Sayoko Kinoshita contributes an informative essay on Japanese animation and there are other short 'tasters' on Africa, Argentina, India, Iran and China. A different volume might have placed the emphasis and focused the attention very differently. The section entitled 'Un carrefour experimental' is disappointingly not about experimental animation, although Georges Sifianos contributes a lone discursive piece about the aesthetics of animation. Lionel Levasseur's essay on the crisis of European animation, punctuated by useful 'boxes' of information written by the ever energetic John Halas, is the only contribution to deal with the huge animated series market which is still dominated by the north Americans with the Japanese close behind: Europe has a less than 8 per cent share of this world market.

However *Le Cinéma d'animation*, by its sheer scope, is a useful reference book – where else would you find an extended essay on Paul Grimault in a book about animation? – and it is a pity that there is no English translation. It is generally recognized that books in English on animation are patchy and unsatisfactory. Cinema bookshops and specialist libraries have plenteous volumes on techniques of animation, ranging from serious works for animators by Halas et al to almost infantile 'how to' books full of colourful illustrations and 'Blue Peter' style instructions which perpetuate the myth that animation (cartooning) is for children. There are also many 'list' books – every film ever made by Jones/Avery/Disney, and so on; every Emmy/Oscar/Grand Prix ever won by an animator,

and the like: all good thorough studies, but limited to commentary and with no theoretical pretensions.

There are one or two excellent books of a more discursive nature: *Of Mice and Magic* (most unfortunately now out of print), a history of Hollywood animated cartoons by Leonard Maltin; and the excellent Russett and Starr book, *Experimental Animation*, the only survey of the 'other side' of animation. There is also Roger Noake's more recent *Animation*, which combines in unique fashion a historical survey and a contemporary overview with a fascinating study of techniques.² On the theoretical side, *The Illusion of Life* edited by Dr Alan Chodolenko (confusingly similar in its title to the huge 'coffee table' book on Walt Disney by Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston)³ promises on the sleeve notes to provide 'the latest post-structural and post-modernist approaches to the theorising of animation'. Unfortunately for this collection there was no pre-poststructural or pre-postmodern theorizing about animation and, as far as can be determined, no other poststructural or postmodern writings on the subject anyway.

Does animation, then, defy the kind of analysis so often found in books on mainstream cinema? A recent informal discussion among animators concluded not. But further discussion failed to define exactly what would be useful.⁴ To return to Bendazzi's introduction, it is certainly true that the 'artist' animators of his category (iii), especially the Europeans, are underrepresented in print. For instance, despite recent major interest in Svankmajer which has produced a welter of catalogue essays and other 'one-off' pieces of writing (which are often difficult to obtain) there is no collection or single large-scale piece of writing on his work. *Le Cinéma d'animation*, then, despite its shortcomings, must be welcomed into this underdeveloped area where nothing quite satisfies.

² Leonard Maltin, *Of Mice and Magic* (New York: Plume, 1980); Russett and Starr, *Experimental Animation*; Noake, *Animation*.

³ Alan Chodolenko (ed.), *The Illusion of Life* (Sydney: Power Publications in association with the Australian Film Commission, 1991); Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston, *Disney Animation: The Illusion of Life* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1981).

⁴ This discussion took place at the Zagreb Animation Festival, June 1992: participants included Joanne Woodward, Robert Beebe, and Bob Godfrey.

review:

Antonia Lant, *Blackout: Reinventing Women for Wartime British Cinema*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991, 262pp.

PAM COOK

Antonia Lant's new book about national identity in British films of World War II is timely. As national boundaries in Europe crumble and new nation states emerge, questions of culture and identity are once again imbued with particular urgency. And the vast amount of literature dealing with the vexed subject of Britain's national cinema which has accrued over the last two decades is ripe for reassessment.

Lant, along with many other commentators, sees World War II as a significant moment for British cinema. Feature films were recognized by the government as a unique medium through which to build community solidarity, and to mobilize citizens for the defence of the all-important home front. The fabrication of a stable, coherent national identity, knitting together differences of class, gender and ethnicity, was central to this project. Through cinematic fictions as diverse as the naval drama *In Which We Serve* (1942) and the period romance *The Man in Grey* (1943), nonmilitary Britons were to be 'called up' to protect another fiction: the British way of life and character as the repository of a unifying set of beliefs, or national ideals.

For fiction it was. Lant outlines the disruptive wartime conditions which militated against the official demand for aesthetic and ideological coherence. At the beginning of the war, cinema's very existence was threatened as studios were requisitioned, technicians conscripted, and lighting rationed. Screenings were interrupted by air raids, while the nature of the audiences themselves changed

rapidly under pressure from European immigration and the GI 'invasion', evacuations, and shifts in gender boundaries as men and women 'stood in' for one another. In the face of these demographic changes, the results of British cinema's attempts to address a unified national subject were often confused and strained.

Nevertheless, Lant identifies a group of films focusing on home front experiences which, she argues, belong to the 'genre of the national subject' in that their address is to an audience nationally defined. Because of their home front emphasis, the chosen films deal mainly with the emotional, psychological aspects of war and with women's experiences. They also conform, or attempt to conform, with the strictures of realism prevalent in debates about national style. British films were to be honest and unpretentious, aesthetically restrained and espousing contemporary relevance. In the context of these prerogatives, it is easy to see why wartime critics derided the excesses of deviant films such as the flamboyant Gainsborough costume dramas. It is less easy to understand why Lant follows these critics' example, bracketing the costume dramas as having less to say for feminism than films dealing with contemporary events.

Hugely popular costume films like *Madonna of the Seven Moons* (1944), *Caravan* (1946) and *The Wicked Lady* (1945) addressed questions of national identity just as directly as did the realist home front movies. Moreover, their box-office success indicates that they spoke equally powerfully to the 'mobilized female spectator' identified by Lant as the addressee of the home front films. Yet they have been consistently marginalized in critical debates around the subject: there has been very little substantial analysis of these films' uneasy relationship to British wartime cinema and its constructions of national identity¹ – even though recent criticism reassessing British cinema has recognized their 'underground' interest.² This suggests not only that the costume dramas flouted the cinematic and ideological conventions of their own time, but also that they do not fit neatly into current theories about what constitutes a British national cinema.

Lant's relegation of the costume dramas to the margins of her discussion impoverishes her arguments. She makes a cogent case for a concept of national identity which is dynamic and historical, rejecting the idea that British national characteristics already exist and are simply available to be infused into a national cinema. Instead, she posits a continuous dialectical process of forging, from traditional notions and forms, new ideas of Britishness defined against other, non-British identities. For Lant, the most important 'other place' against which Britain defined itself during the war was the USA, and her choice of films and discussion of national identity and femininity concentrate on this antagonistic relationship. She draws a picture of a British national cinema which refused Hollywood spectacle in favour of documentary realism, an emphasis

1 See Sue Aspinall and Robert Murphy (eds), *Dossier No. 18: Gainsborough Melodrama* (London: British Film Institute, 1983); Sue Harper, 'Historical pleasures' in Christine Gledhill (ed.), *Home is Where the Heart is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1987).

2 See Charles Barr (ed.), *All Our Yesterdays: Ninety Years of British Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1986).

on ordinary people in everyday situations, deglamorized heroines, and a lack of conventional narrative closure. This narrow focus prevents her from confronting the implications of Britain's equally problematic relationship with that other Significant Other: Europe. The Gainsborough costume dramas were often set in European locales, while their narratives played out the seductive dangers of crosscultural romance. Through a selfconscious play with costume and identity, they explored and often challenged the parochial concepts of Britishness, and British cinema, prevalent in the critically sanctioned realist films. In her second chapter, Lant discusses the importance of codes of dress, crossdressing and makeup to the construction of the British 'mobile woman' – but without integrating her insights into a wider theory of sexual and national identity. And in spite of her recognition of the demographic effects of 1930s and 1940s European immigration, she never considers (except in a brief aside in the chapter devoted to Powell and Pressburger's *A Canterbury Tale*) the implications for a 'national style' of the influx of European emigrés into the British film industry.

Lant's extended discussion in Chapter 3 of the material and metaphorical significance of the eponymous blackout (the extinguishing of all external artificial light at night) is the centre of the book. Here coalesce many of her ideas about wartime anxieties around gender uncertainties (intensified in the dark), the centrality of (impaired) vision to despecularized wartime British cinema, and the iconographic force of the blackout trope in signifying 'British cinema' across a range of films. Lant insists on the polysemic nature of the blackout (one wonders why she needs two heavyweight cultural theorists, Terry Eagleton and Fredric Jameson, to back her up on this point) and traces its varied career through Alexander Korda's *Perfect Strangers* (1945), where it enables magical sexual and class transformations in the hero and heroine, to its use in cartoons and advertisements to evoke eroticism, danger, misrecognition and female duplicity. The blackout was first and foremost a way of controlling vision, of denying the country's visibility to the enemy; but by its very nature it also denied vision to the country's inhabitants themselves, thereby potentially unleashing all manner of illicit encounters and events.

Lant points to the way the experience of blackout heightened the wartime spectator's pleasure by offering the possibility of 'viewing horizontally' in the dark, forbidden outside the theatre. She goes on to suggest that one explanation for cinema attendances reaching an alltime high during the war could be the intensification of voyeuristic pleasures brought about by the peculiar conditions of war: in the cinema, the spectator could enjoy an activity restricted in the outside world to the enemy or the spy. This is the strongest chapter, successfully integrating Lant's detailed analysis of mixed archival

material into a wider argument about the necessary but uneven relationship between psychosocial, aesthetic and technological factors.

The last two chapters of *Blackout* are devoted to indepth readings of specific films: *Brief Encounter* (1945) and a comparison of the UK and US release versions of *A Canterbury Tale* (1944 and 1949). Noel Coward and David Lean's film straddles the transition from war to peace, producing a representation of British motherhood which exorcizes the past to conjure up a vision of future domestic stability. Set in 1939, the story is told in a succession of nonchronologically ordered flashbacks punctuated and orchestrated by the middle-class heroine Laura Jesson's voice over. The film was widely praised by critics for its 'realism': Lant's reading reveals a tension between its realist strategies (the everyday ordinariness of protagonists and locations) and the use of multiple temporalities and expressionist lighting and imagery to project the heroine's emotional and psychological state. Formally advanced though *Brief Encounter* was, its conservative, moralistic portrayal of class and sexual mores alienated the largely working-class wartime audiences, and it was a financial flop. In Lant's analysis it comes over as a hysterical text, at odds with its historical moment and caught in a crisis of representation.

It is this sense of crisis which pervades Lant's book. She effectively demonstrates that the wartime effort to produce a coherent national identity and film style against the tide of dramatic social change was riven with contradictions, particularly when it came to picturing femininity. She also argues that British wartime cinema was unusual among national cinemas in being tied to the material conditions of war, building its iconography from the facts of home front experience. This argument justifies the book's focus on a specific range of films, but it also begs the question of the relationship of non home front movies to the 'genre of the national subject', and therefore of her particular conception of national identity. Her parochial approach also evades the question of historical continuity. For instance, *Brief Encounter*'s portrayal of suburban woman in turmoil harks back to literature of the 1930s. Lant recognizes that Noel Coward transposed his 1936 playlet to 1939 and discusses the formal differences between the two, but fails to explore the connections between the 1945 Laura Jesson and her prewar sisters, already in the throes of social transformation. Such an investigation might reveal that, in spite of its historical specificity, wartime British cinema's depiction of femininity represents less of a 'break' than Lant implies.

Paradoxically, the book's tendency to overvalue the wartime context dehistoricizes its subject, as does the cursory use of theoretical references, which are often used to back up points which Lant does not argue through sufficiently. She rarely engages

critically with the work she cites, which means that one gets little sense of recent debates about British cinema and national identity. By failing adequately to situate her work within this history of ideas, Lant's book itself manifests symptoms of blackout.

review:

Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff, *A Social History of Broadcasting: Volume 1, 1922–1939*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991, 441pp.

John Corner (ed.), *Popular Television in Britain: Studies in Cultural History*. London: British Film Institute, 1991, 211pp.

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Media studies, to take a generic if obviously loose term, is not renowned for its historical imagination. The shift from literary to film studies, via early auteur theory, to my mind even now shadows much of the writing in the field; just as it seems that the most compelling work is still apt to foreground the text and pay relatively little attention to its historical conditions of production. If, as we are now informed, History (absolute and upper case) is unknowable, at least the text – scooting hither and thither, its meaning continually deferred – nonetheless is *there*. But the resulting textualism is overbearing. Television as a form has been particularly ill-served in this respect. In its own way the medium itself resists historical inquiry. The receiver, the television set, has acquired a defining position in the domestic environment but one which is so much part of modern life that it remains, in the routine of things, unquestioned; while the programmes it receives are necessarily ephemeral, part of the flow of images endlessly reproduced day by day. Yet nothing is so striking as being confronted by replays of early television shows, advertising, and so on: it confirms in the most immediate of terms our own historicity, in which contemporary daily programming – banal, but *our* banality – is defamiliarized at a stroke. If the immediacy of television output in closeup deflects historical explanation, the *longue durée* of television history – by

which I mean decades and years rather than minutes and seconds – offers exciting possibilities for cultural history.

The books reviewed here engage directly if modestly with this problem of history. Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff opt for the orthodox if now barely fashionable designation of ‘social history’, while John Corner more knowingly identifies his collection as ‘cultural history’. Either way, both books mark an important shift in the history of the mass media, promising for their respective media the possibilities of a coherent ‘regional’ history (to borrow an equally unfashionable, antiquated term from what once were projected as the imperial splendours of structural Marxism). *A Social History of Broadcasting* is a considered, consolidated publication, resulting from a decade or more of immersion in the archives, and represents the beginnings of a larger historical project. The essays collected by John Corner are evidently more provisional, opening a field of research which has barely been explored. There are, one might note, connections between the two ventures: Scannell has published for Corner, and Corner for Scannell; and all are – more or less intimately – associated with the journal *Media, Culture and Society*.¹

Both books are reticent about their respective methodologies: *A Social History of Broadcasting*, I presume, out of a desire to prevent textual overload; while Corner seems to have been keen to allow his authors free rein. The image of the archaeologist is common to both endeavours, conveying the attempt to explain the processes of reconstructing from fragments radio or television programmes which never were recorded, programmes which now register only in the memory traces of listeners and viewers of a particular generation. Both books, too, are forced to rely on general histories which boast very different theoretical inspiration from the projects in hand: Scannell and Cardiff make use of old, reliable, but very limited textbooks; while Corner and his authors unquestioningly cite cultural histories for their period which were redundant even before they were published.

A Social History of Broadcasting is a truly magisterial work, unlikely to be bettered for a generation. It is – contrary to the authors’ declarations – (almost) as comprehensive as one could expect, carefully researched and put together with great skill.² It is an edifyingly sober work, written in sparse but lucid prose, refusing to indulge in anything but the occasional anecdote. Its depth of empirical research is impressive and it is about as far distant from the current predilection of cultural theorists for the high-voltage vagaries of poststructuralism as anything one is likely to find this side of the millennium.

Throughout the 1980s the authors published their findings widely in essay form. Those who know this work will find little that, in itself, is new. There are chapters on broadcasting and

¹ See John Corner (ed.), *Documentary and The Mass Media* (London: Edward Arnold, 1986); and Paddy Scannell (ed.), *Broadcast Talk* (London: Sage, 1991).

² The authors decided to exclude discussion of Empire broadcasting. Given the inextricable historical connections between the nation and its empire I believe this a mistake. Clues to the significance of this for the self-image of the BBC can be found in Gerald Mansell, *Let The Truth Be Told: Fifty Years of BBC External Broadcasting* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982).

unemployment, and broadcasting and foreign affairs; on features and documentaries; on music, entertainment and variety – all of which, in scope at least, are familiar from earlier publications. For *aficionados* it is satisfying to see major figures of the period who were first recovered in the early essays here given recognition as significant intellectuals in their own right: Hilda Matheson, A. E. Harding, D. G. Bridson, Olive Shapley.

Since the beginning the distinctive intellectual trademark of the Scannell/Cardiff partnership has been their insistence on understanding broadcasting as a complex of social relations, requiring that appropriate attention be given to the interplay between textual production and consumption. This approach is refined and developed here, allowing a wide range of radio texts to be situated in a detailed reconstruction of their institutional conditions of production, and linked too to listener response. In each case the authors emphasize the complex and at times unexpected processes in which radio broadcasting emerged through a protracted history of political negotiation, aesthetic invention and technological development, producing in the process the highly idealized figure of ‘the listener’. The earlier essays were innovative in marking out, department by department and genre by genre, discrete developments. But it is precisely the connections between programme policies and the overall development of broadcasting institutions which allow one to see radio cohering as radio, and it is this above all which the book delivers with enviable sophistication and erudition.

Just as Scannell and Cardiff set out to explain the formation of British radio as a specific broadcasting medium, so Corner and his colleagues, in more tentative mode, attempt to do the same for television in *Popular Television in Britain*. The results are uneven, inevitably perhaps in an anthology such as this and when commentators are still dazzled by such a relatively new field of research. But it is an engaging collection, and would make a good student text. Selectively, it traces aspects of television history in Britain from its beginnings to the 1960s. An idea of television in its earliest moments can be gleaned from John Caughie’s chapter: ‘*The Golden Drake*, transmitted 3.25–3.40pm on 3 November 1936 – “A model of Drake’s famous ship made by L.A. Stock, a bus-driver, who will explain its construction” – was repeated live at 9.25–9.40pm the same evening, when L.A. Stock returned to the studio and described the model’s construction again’.

Later chapters review particular programmes, genres and cultures of television. John Corner’s own contribution on the emergence of television documentary is a fine reconstruction, developing the work of Scannell and Cardiff on the radio documentaries of the thirties. Andy Medhurst provides a suitably entertaining, irreverent account of Gilbert Harding; not only connecting the historiographical

debates on sexuality with those on the mass media, but to even greater effect managing to cite Jeremy Beadle and Michael Ignatieff in a single sentence. Open the box, Andy! An invitingly eclectic range of chapters surveys – amongst other things – *Z Cars*, *Quatermass* and *Hancock's Half Hour*, and we learn from John Hill, writing about television and pop, that the maestro for Saturday afternoon grapple fans, none other than Kent Walton, first appeared on British television (even then as no spring chicken) fronting *Cool for Cats* in 1956.

It may be apparent, from these partial revelations, that a highly subjective input – on my own part – shapes my reading of the book. Like many of the contributors, I guess, my own memory has been formed by the programmes discussed in the book, and this is what – for this generation at least – makes it so tantalizing. Memories here are at odds with the conventions of positivist historiography. (Only in retrospect do I see I was a child victim of the pernicious Toddlers' Truce, an imposition of state control happily replaced in 1957 by *Tonight*.) This raises serious issues. As Scannell and Cardiff argue for radio in the earlier period, it is necessary to understand the transformations in the medium across programmes and genres. Many of the chapters here, for example, cite 1962 – not, I might suggest, a key shift within the conventional historiography – as a decisive moment in the making of contemporary television (even though mention of Telstar, the event of July 1962, fails to appear). Important too are the more complex questions of how precisely television in this period organized the subjectivities of its viewers such that even today, some thirty years later, I experience a momentary frisson merely on reading about the first episode of *Z Cars*.

These theoretical questions are more fully addressed, or at least dealt with, by Scannell and Cardiff – to some degree in *A Social History of Broadcasting*, but more forcefully and polemically in various related articles. Here it is worth identifying the shifts which have occurred since the project began. In the early 1980s Scannell and Cardiff's work was pretty much compatible with a loose Gramscianism, evident most of all in the context of the Open University's Popular Culture course, to which they contributed. Undoubtedly their emphasis fell on the specificities both of the radio form and its particular histories; and the seriousness with which they approached these issues has made their work all the more compelling. The conformity with a Gramscian perspective, however, placed at the centre of their analysis questions of power and of the politics of representation. Although never for a moment reductive, their reading of the BBC as a governing institution, and of the place of Reith within it, was always informed by an overarching framework in which the power of the media to organize popular practices was taken as axiomatic. And as I remember it (my sources

3 Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom*, 4 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960–79).

4 Scannell, 'Introduction', *Broadcast Talk*, p. 3.

here rely as much on late night drinking as on textual backup, and may not withstand professional scrutiny) this critical stance applied not only to the BBC, but also to its public historiography in the form of Asa Briggs's insufferably pedestrian history of broadcasting in Britain – which effectively doubles up as the official history of the BBC.³

Now, in the book, the degree of critique has been relaxed and – a move characteristic of the later eighties – there has been a move away from Gramsci. At stake in this new turn is the nature of public broadcasting and of the BBC. Most of all this change of tack derives from recognition that 'broadcasters, while they control the discourse, do not control the communicative context'.⁴ Thus whatever may be the intentions of the producers the ineluctable realities of popular and everyday life consistently undermine what in an older vocabulary were taken to be the 'preferred readings' of media texts, thereby reassigning to the audience a high measure of autonomy and popular sovereignty. Such an approach is not logically incompatible with a theory of hegemony. But if pushed, it could be. If pushed, so far as the British context is concerned, the BBC becomes not a means by which popular practices are 'conformed' (teeth-grittingly, as Althusser was always wont to add) but rather a relatively free cultural space in which the popular autonomy of the sovereign listener can be exercised.

And indeed in relation to the BBC the authors' tone is now altogether more respectful. We might note in passing that there is no hint of criticism directed towards Briggs, and that the photographic plates reproducing the portraits of the early BBC managers imitate the style of an official history. (I was also entertained by a couple of cosy references to George V as 'the old king' – a touch of discursive seepage from Richard Dimbleby, I think.) But most interesting – and deliberate – is the long quote from Reith which precedes the Introduction, in which with typical clarity of purpose, unremitting impatience and idiosyncratic syntax Reith, in 1924, denounces all those who condemned the coming of broadcasting. 'To disregard the spread of knowledge [brought about by broadcasting], with the consequent enlargement of opinion, and to be unable to supplement it with reasoned arguments, or to supply satisfactory answers to legitimate and intelligent questions, is not only dangerous but stupid.' Far from reproducing a reflex academic leftism, in which the BBC gets its usual going-over, what we now read from Scannell and Cardiff is a calculated defence, in which Reith himself is prominent.

This defence of public broadcasting is outlined in its essentials in the first chapter ('Public service broadcasting') and in more charged vein, for consumption by what seem to be perceived as potentially hostile specialists within the academy, in an article written by Paddy Scannell at the same time and published in *Media, Culture and*

5 Paddy Scannell, 'Public service broadcasting and modern public life', republished in Paddy Scannell, Philip Schlesinger and Colin Sparks (eds), *Culture and Power: A 'Media, Culture and Society' Reader* (London: Sage, 1992).

Society.⁵ Here 'the mass media' (which become reduced to an extraordinary abstraction, carrying with it a disconcerting slippage between 'broadcasting' and 'public broadcasting') are regarded in no way as 'manipulative' (deriving from fears of social control, cultural standardization or ideological misrepresentation) but as an unadorned public good. By creating access for the masses the media have democratized and 'equalized' public life, while at the same time 'resocializing' private life. 'I believe', claims Scannell in a closing credo, 'that broadcasting has enhanced the reasonable character and conduct of twentieth-century life by augmenting claims to communicative entitlements.'

Post-Murdoch, witnessing the spectacular commodification of all cultural forms, these are deadly serious arguments. In order to reach his conclusions, however, it looks as if Paddy Scannell has felt compelled to burn his boats, jettisoning any theoretical approach which assigns to the mass media a capacity to exercise power (as opposed, more neutrally, to the ability to 'influence' cultural life). In establishing his case he commits the symbolic destruction of Stuart Hall in a facile, robustly intemperate attack which may suggest that he has unwittingly appropriated more of the Reith persona than he had bargained for.

The theoretical influences are now found in Habermas's explorations in communicative rationality, in a very particular reading of the ethnomethodology of social interactionism (Garfinkel, Schutz, and Goffman) and various conceptions of everyday life. This new theoretical agenda comes close to proposing a rationally conceived pluralism, in which the mass media are conceptualized as functioning as a relatively free arbiter between public and private: whether for good or ill appears quite contingent.

This shift was clearly formed in reaction to the whole brouhaha over the ISAs, and so on; and Scannell and Cardiff were not alone in embarking upon such reconceptualizations. Most influential have been the feminist recuperations of the popular, domestic pleasures of television and the mass media. (And, for the sake of historical record, it could be said that much of this work also developed at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies with Stuart Hall: Dorothy Hobson, Charlotte Brunsdon and, working in a different medium, Janice Winship, all come to mind.) Clearly much of importance comes out of this change of tack. The emphasis on the 'enlargement of public opinion' is vital, significantly reordering the terms of debate. In moving away from Gramsci and offering a renewed emphasis on ethnomethodology new questions are opened about the very processes of human communication. In combining these approaches Scannell and Cardiff are also able to avoid the mindless elitism commonly associated with Reith, which to this day provides the intellectual grounds for the most usual defence of public broadcasting. At the same time theirs is an approach which can have

6 See for example, most recently, John Hartley, *Tele-ology: Studies in Television* (London: Routledge, 1992).

no truck with the populist hyperbole which is currently riding high – in which the popular media are revered precisely to the extent to which profanity, banality and irrationality predominate, thus (so we are led to believe) transgressing the putative protocols of bourgeois high reason.⁶ In this sense Scannell and Cardiff propose a genuinely new framework for thinking through these issues.

Even so, I am doubtful if a breezy liquidation of all the old conceptual issues really does present such an advance. The questions of power, subjectivity and representation may be couched in theoretical systems which Scannell and Cardiff find inimical, but that does not mean that we can do without them. In practical terms they concede this time and again, but can only allow for a pragmatic resolution. In recuperating and rewriting Reith in defiance of postmodern culture they have written a perversely wonderful history book. But I cannot believe that in the twentieth century the mass media have only advanced by their 'good' side. In these bad new times the 'enlargement of public opinion' is altogether a more contradictory business.